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Yomu Mishima
三嶋与夢
illustration
ともぞ
ヒーロー文庫

Sevens

I've Got Nothing, Throw me a Bone Here, Fourteenth Generation

Author: Wai

Illustrator: Tomozo

Translate: Yoraikun

Epub: Henkanepubs

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Prologue

The Labyrinth subjugation base south of Beim had gotten around to simply be called South Beim.

That small town that was said to have been made by those exiled from the city had gained some vitality in less than a month.

That's how it was supposed to be, and a number of merchant houses had flooded in. The port was, at the very least able to moor three ships, so ships were moving back and forth.

The craftsmen brought in by the merchants and other relevant parties instantly increased the town's population.

In that energetic South Beim, with Monica and Clara… the three of us looked at Porter in the warehouse.

Having been worn through by constant use, Porter had been serviced by Monica for the long journey ahead, but…

"Porter… you've grown up splendidly."

… Touching both hands to my mouth, I looked at Porter.

On its cylinder of a head, two large, round eyes. That part hadn't changed. But its body had undergone heavy modifications. It was almost a lump of iron… there stood Porter's gallant figure.

From the Jewel… the ancestors' hearts were also moved.

『Porter is our comrade. Looks like he's become somewhat splendid while we weren't looking.』
『I… seem to be feeling attachment towards this mass of iron and clockwork.』
『This density, this dignity. While being even more refined than before, that astoundingly charming body, the perfect assimilation of pointlessness and male romance… Porter, you're the best.』

It was just as the Seventh said. This Porter… had become one size larger. Monica had looked at Damien's large-scale Porter, and took

it as a challenge I'm sure.

Its greatest showpiece was the pair of arms folded on top.

The parts it used were externally reinforced much like the armor of the armored giant monster we once defeated in Arumsaas, and carefully manufactured.

Monica spoke, brimming with pride.

"It would be troubling if that was enough to amaze you. This Monica… is fundamentally greater than those three units at Professor Damien's place. Fundamentally! Porter, show everyone your true form! …Clara-san, as we discussed, please."

Monica assumed a pose, but when Clara didn't show any reaction, she took a few glances, and sent a request.

Clara quietly nodded, and held up her staff.

Slowly coming alive, Porter's front portion lifted up, and became a torso.

The arms on its back were deployed, and its leg portion was supported up by an increased eight tires with a reinforced frame.

"WOOOAAAHH!!"

When I showed my excitement, Monica excitedly looked at me.

"Amazing, isn't it! Monica is different from those scrap metals around the place! My base specs are different than those garbage that would rejoice at some version upgrade, or a small modification! Now bear witness, my chicken dickwaaad!!"

Holding both hands towards the ceiling, her yell sounded as if it came straight from her soul.

Inside the Jewel, the ancestors as well…

『Amazing. You're amazing, Porter!』
『You did your best…』

『What a form. This boorish form… it's perfect, is it not!』

But there was a single one to give a cold opinion. It was Milleia-san. Having joined along the way, Milleia-san didn't have any affection for Porter. Let alone that, she was a person who said his head was unnecessary. And she offered her fifty copper.

『… Are these functions really necessary? They aren't, right? Rather, this… how much space is taken to stow those unnecessary parts? I don't know what to think about adding on strange features and doing nothing to make your trip more comfortable.』

I wanted to tell her how she just didn't get it, but it's true it was an important point.

"… Monica, I understand that Porter has been reborn. So how are its specs compared to before? As in usable space, and comfort."

Monica stuck out her index finger, and bent it left and right.

"Chicken dickwad, you'd do best not to underestimate me. I've sacrificed a bit of space, but I put the craftsmen to work."

To her, Clara quietly.

"You overworked them, is what you mean. If Monica-san ever approaches them with a smile, the dwarves and gnomes will now run away at full force."

I looked at Monica.

"What exactly did you do?"

She shrugged her shoulders, and shook her head tiredly.

"They're craftsmen. They shine best when they're desperately trying to surmount an impossible order. On the contrary, I'd like you to praise me. Because this Monica has passed down various lost crafts. For the sake of South Beim's future, no… for the sake of my chicken!"

I circled around to Porter's back, and opened the door.

“It’s gotten a little narrower? Well, there are sofas, or rather benches attached on both sides, so perhaps that’s why it looks that way.”

The mass of metal porter… when transporting goods or people, that reliable and central member of our party had been reborn.

As I returned to Monica’s side, Clara reverted Porter to its original form.

She tilted her head.

“It’s weight has gone up considerably. Yet even so, I get the feeling the Mana expenditure to drive it has lowered. And whenever I move it, something feels off.”

Monica walked up to Porter, opened up its front portion, and showed it off.

In it, the three stones of the Peridot we’d found in the Labyrinth had been embedded. There were strange mechanisms furnished around them.

“Ah, my gemstones…”

“… That’s right! This is Porter’s energy source! By it, Porter will surely move more powerfully than before! It’s truly Porter’s heart! With only three gemstones, we’ve achieved a suitable means of operation!”

As Monica took some glances at me, I’d like to believe she did feel at least a bit of guilt at taking them.

And I put a hand to Porter, and muttered.

“Porter, good for you.”

Clara, in regards to me.

“If Lyle-san’s fine with that, then so be it. More so, you’re just going to ignore how she arbitrarily used the gemstones? You neglected to report that to the party, Monica-san.”

On Clara's words, Monica flipped each of her twin tails.

"That was the chicken dickwad's personal possession. And I am the chicken dickwad's personal possession. Ergo, everything of the chicken dickwad's belongs to me. And all of me belongs to the chicken dickwad! So there's no problem to speak of!"

When she checked to see if I was mad, she had given quite an outrageous statement, so I chopped her head form behind.

"Of course it's no good. Say you're going to use them beforehand."

"Auu… but everyone was so busy these days, and whenever you got back, you'd all collapse asleep, so I was trying to be tactful in my own way."

Right, we were busy.

It wasn't just South Beim, we had a necessity to act for what was to come. Porter's modifications were a part of that.

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… Eva was negotiating with the tribe of elves that had dropped by South Beim.

They were on the main street, where a stage had been prepared for the minstrels and traveling performers.

In that space with heavy pedestrian traffic, Eva made a certain request to the troupe… to the tribe.

"… And this is the song and story I'd like you to spread. It can just be in rumors, so can't you circulate it? The collateral is your lodging fee in South Beim. We'll make it dirt cheap."

For a travelling troupe, cheap lodging was an appreciated gesture. Hearing that, the young-man-like head elf touched a hand to his

chin.

“It’s a request from a daughter of the Nihil. We’ll listen to it. By the way, there are a number of things I’d like to ask about. Fort Redant, or perhaps Fortress, I’d like to know the particular details of it. The story of the Hero who fought back an army of monsters is in fashion these days. We just flowed into Beim ourselves, so we’ve no clue of it.”

Eva, upon hearing that.

“Where did you come from? Not Zayin or Lorphys, right? Galleria? Rusworth? Doesn’t look it. I doubt it’s Cartaffs, and…”

The head elf let out a sigh.

“Bahnseim. We ran away from there. It’s in a terrible state right not.”

Eva nodded at the head, and inquired with a serious face.

“Bahnseim, huh. If you’ll exchange it for info on Bahnseim, then I’ll oblige. I was there before, but has it really gotten that bad?”

The head looked at the sky.

“War, or rather trampling down. It was the first time I ever witnessed an army that didn’t fear death. The authority grasped by the future queen of Bahnseim, it reeks of abnormality. It could be the case she’ll leave her name in history. In a bad sense.”

Eva knew of Celes’ abnormality. If you hadn’t seen it up close… if passed by lip, it was only the cruel queen-to-be of Bahnseim, end of story.

That was how Beim was. Even when info on Celes came in, it was a common tale. Or perhaps an atrocious woman… is how they summed it up.

Some part of the city was convinced it was fire on the opposite shore. Eva listened to the head’s words of Bahnseim.

“I got the feeling ruin was coming closer by the day. The men were rounded up for war, and not villages alone, even the larger towns were only women and children. Seeing an old one was a rare sight. Refugees turned bandit are increasing. We were attacked a number of times on the way.”

Abandon food supplies and run, or fight amongst each other to keep it. Hearing that story, Eva was sure it was truly a terrible situation.

“Hey, aren’t there any nobles rebelling against the throne? Feudal lords are fine too.”

On her question, the head shook his head.

“There are none. To rephrase, there were. Past tense. Many feudal lords have been crushed. Centralle’s army was one thing, but the Walt House was also involved. It just goes to show their title of Bahnseim’s strongest wasn’t for show.”

Lyle’s home, the Walt House, was cooperating in crushing the country’s opposing powers. At that, Eva felt a hint of irony…

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… May was counting the increasing food stands in South Beim.

“Oooh! There are three more today! Is that one sweets? The next smells of meat. Hah… three whole new comrades on my food walking course.”

She looked over the stands with an expression of bliss, as she happily thought over what she would eat today.

“Yesterday was deep fried, so meat for today… no, it’s hard to dismiss fresh sweets. But I don’t have the war funds to eat all of them… what a tragedy.”

May generally only ever used her money on food, and she had

received some from Novem so she could walk the stands and eat.

She didn't have the intent to go as far as to manage her own money, and she was sure she was fine that way. Because of that, she received payment as a daily allowance from Novem.

"Okay, it all starts with some juice to wet the throat. Let's go with some refreshing citrus, why not."

There, the small-built May stopped her feet's course to the stand, and turned around.

With long, unkempt black hair, and a coat that wasn't yet a match for the season, a woman of high stature stood.

"… If you're going to rampage here, then stop. This happens to be one of my favorites."

Her opponent was Marina.

Marina tossed the paper bag in her hands towards May. Taking it, May found the bag was warm, and her eyes sparkled as she unearthed the skewer meat within.

Enduring the drool creeping its way to the surface.

"W-what are you planning?"

She took some fleeting glances between Marina and the bag as she asked.

"Nothing. It's been a while since I got to go that wild. It was fun, so I'm thanking you. And I'd like to meet your leader. He did quite a dirty thing. It's gotten hard for me to live in Beim."

May observed Marina's state, and noticed that was a lie. She took a skewer from the bag, brought it to her mouth, and bit in.

"Introduction fee, was it? Very well, I'll arrange it for you."

"Thanks for that. With failure, and a few other reasons tacked on, they ran off with all the money I'd been saving up, so now I'm

broke.”

That one did not look like a lie.

May bit further into the meat on the stick, and ate it heartily as she looked at Marina.

“And so? What’s your real objective? For someone of your level, ma’am, I’m sure any Guild would accept you.”

Marina laughed.

“When you’ve lived much longer than I, ma’am? Girly, you’ll get on well in the world.”

With her own form, May knew Marina would feel uncomfortable if treated as a little girl. It was something she learned to blend in with the world of humans.

But even so, looked on from around, it’s true it looked uncomfortable.

May quietly continued on into the meat. Marina muttered something like, ‘fine, you win’, and began speaking.

“I don’t really care about only the East Branch escaping, and being isolated as a result. But you see… I have an interest in the leader one like you would serve. Is that boy also strong?”

Lyle had Marina’s eyes set on him…

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… Within the Jewel.

In Lyle’s room of memories, the room he had once lived his life. The form of his youth… LYLE quietly sat.

He crossed his legs on top of the bed, left his elbows against his lap,

and placed his jaw on his hands.

His form was a child, but he had a bit of presence to him.

『… The Fifth will have stay a while. I want Lyle to know him. Though he may feel something after knowing him. But before that…』

LYLE looked up at the ceiling.

『Even if you don't want to see who you really are, you're abandoning me too much. I'm going to develop abandonment issues. This form is your own. It's the form of your younger years, and yet…』

Lyle's room in the Jewel had become a room filled with what he didn't want to see. The Jewel had interfered. Celes had interfered. And it was a room born as the result.

And the young boy LYLE was the form of the current Lyle himself.

LYLE was sealed away, and the Lyle that was born was just a small child's heart in a large body.

He had matured under the watch of the ancestors, and had grown mentally stable, but there was an insecure existence to him.

If LYLE's memory returned, that balance would crumble. Then who am I? It was clear he would come to be haunted by such worries.

『Lyle, just face me. I know you're scared of the potential you lost. But even so… you can only erase me and move on.』

In an expression unthinkable from a child, LYLE muttered sorrowfully…

Setting off from Beim

… Within the Jewel.

On the area extending across the round table room, Miranda was blown off, and rolled across the ground.

She caught herself, and stood, before her eyes, Milleia expressionlessly pointing her gun, and pulling the trigger.

Bending her body to avoid the bullet, She wrapped threads around Milleia's arm, and used brute force to throw her against the wall. But flying through the air, Milleia used the bayonet on her gun to sever the thread, and in her dress, she touched her feet to the wall, and ran down it.

Pulling a gun from her frilly sleeve, she fired a round at Miranda, and discarded the handgun. Those guns that required a shell exchange after every shot all had bayonets attached, making her capable of close-quarter-combat.

Miranda ran forward, and tried avoiding the shot, but her thigh was pierced, and she fell flat on the spot.

Stooping over in fear, Shannon tried to use her Demon eyes to see a weakness in Milleia, but with the gunpoint turned to her…

"Eeeek!"

… She cried, and averted her eyes. When Milleia's bullet embedded itself near her feet, Shannon fell back onto her bottom.

Miranda's injuries recovered, and trying to stand, she made a golem with magic.

That doll of mud blocked the way between her and Milleia. Milleia reloaded shells into her guns as she walked forward, heading straight for the large golem whose height exceeded three meters.

"Kuh!"

The golem looked to be at an overwhelming advantage, but even so, Miranda knew it was nothing more than a means to buy time.

From Miranda's point of view, she saw the large golem's back as it slammed its large fist into Milleia. Right after, it was violently torn up, the golem crumbling away, and returning to the soil.

Beyond the crumbling golem, stood Milleia with two guns. Her grinning feature was accompanied by a sweat across Miranda's face.

"… It really is unbelievable."

Her opponent was her own ancestor, and someone related to the Walt House, she was told, but this was definitely out of the norm.

To Miranda, Milleia spoke.

『What's with you, looking at someone as if they're some sort of monster. That's downright rude.』

Putting away her guns, Milleia stroked her hair, and looked around. Seeing Shannon still curled up on the ground, she let out a sigh.

『Shannon. Your eyes are capable of at least this much. Good grief, fixating on nothing but interfering with others' minds. Look at the Mana flow a bit, and try searching for where you have to prick to break them.』

While Miranda wiped her sweat, Shannon was on the verge of tears.

"It's impossible! In a situation like that, I can't see that much!"

Tears pooling in her eyes as she shook her head. Milleia looked at Shannon, and dropped her shoulders. Lately, they had been entering the Jewel to receive instruction from Milleia. But not a single one of the Walt House ancestors would pop their faces out.

Among them, only Milleia was assertively involved with the sisters.

『You really are uselessly cute, Shannon.』

Fed up, Milleia headed for Shannon, and lent her a hand to stand

her up. And she used a hand to brush away the dirt on her clothing. If left alone, that dirt would fade away, so Miranda thought it a pointless act.

“Shannon, help out a bit more. Fighting her alone is difficult.”

When Miranda complained, Milleia touched a hand to her mouth.

『If you can’t beat me alone, then I can’t imagine how you’ll fare in what’s to come, Miranda. You must properly understand what it means to be a woman of the Walt House. Among the House Heads’ wives, and daughters, there are a number of them stronger than me.』

Hearing that, Miranda felt her head was starting to hurt. She didn’t think herself weak, but she was reminded there was always someone stronger. And it felt she was she was being shown a lesson by the out-of-the-norm clan called the Walt House.

“You mean to say the current me is not worthy?”

On Miranda’s words, Milleia made an intrigued expression.

『Whether you’re worthy or not… in the end, the one to decide is Lyle, Miranda.』

Milleia brought the two of them close, and slowly began to speak.

『I’m counting on the two of you. That you’ll support Lyle up. But you see, at the same time, I want you both to be happy. Miranda who resembles me, and Shannon who inherited my eyes. You’re both my cute descendants.』

Milleia embraced them, and spoke. Miranda was a little embarrassed, while Shannon timidly gripped Milleia’s clothing before returning the embrace.

Shannon didn’t remember much about her mother, so the shadow of her sister and mother likely overlapped with Milleia for her.

『… Once upon a time. When I was young, I mean. My eyes wouldn’t see. A physical disability was a heavy burden on a noble.

A failure, a disgrace… my brothers, and sisters said it too. Among the retainers were those prejudice against me as well. Just by being there, I was a drawback to the Walt House, they said.』

Milleia continued reciting the tale.

『But you see. The eldest brother was kind. He was awkward, but as he was, he rebelled at the ways of the Walt House, and always opposed my father. Perhaps I was the cause of that, but he really treasured me. And my father would treat me the same as he would my brothers and sisters. He wouldn't permit my lack of sight being used as an excuse. Everyone called him a cold person, but being treated normally was an extremely joyous thing to me. There are plenty of awkward people out there. Weak, and getting lonely easily. The Walt House is shouldered by nothing but those sorts… so you have to support it up.』

Milleia turned a smile to Miranda and Shannon. And with that smile.

『And you see. Men of the Walt House are quite good at rolling around on their women's palms.』

… Shannon was dumbfounded.

"… I thought it would turn into a nice story along the way."

She looked severely disappointed. As she thought, Milleia was Miranda. Miranda reaffirmed it as well.

But Milleia spoke.

『Hmm? You don't look so pleased. Good grief, this is why children are… you listening? Now I'm going to teach you something extremely important. You could even call it the trick to get a Walt man dancing on the palm of your hand.』

Miranda reacted a bit, and raised her head.

"Trick?"

Shannon looked at her.

“Sis… you don’t have to bite on so hard.”

Milleia embraced the two of them again, and whispered in their ears…

『The trick is…』

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South Beim.

Inside the prepared horse-drawn wagon, Metal lump Porter was letting off some conspicuous colors.

It was early in the morning, around, the working Valkyries briskly pushing along preparations.

Within all that, I took out the list I’d gotten from Novem.

“Lyle-sama, all the preparations are in order. For Fortress Redant, Adele-san and Maksim-san led along the Valkyries that finished up work first, and entered Bahnseim. We will be entering other countries by sea, before heading in the direction of Bahnseim.”

Nodding, I looked at Porter.

Loaded with cargo, and after everything was in order, Monica carried out a final check. Clara accompanied her, similarly checking off packages.

I looked at the list.

“I get Aria and Clara. I’m thankful you were able to send Monica around to this side. But why is Shannon with me too? We’re heading through Cartaffs to Bahnseim, and Faunbeux, right?”

While we had the Fourth’s Skill… Speed… our distance to travel was extremely long. And we were relatively short on time, so we

needed to get Faunbeux's agreement on assistance.

But the members assigned to me were Aria, Clara, and Monica and Shannon.

I got Aria. She was a valuable war potential.

Clara was needed to operate Porter.

Monica… asserted she would stick with me, and it's more that we approved it.

But couldn't Shannon just hold down the fort? Or so I thought.

Novem sat on a wooden crate, and kicked her legs up and down as she sent a glance to Shannon. The reason Shannon was just staring at the busily moving Valkyries was because she knew she would get in the way if she tried to help.

"Shannon-chan volunteered. Miranda-san also acknowledged it. My side has me, Miranda-san, Eva-san, and May-chan. We're taking along Marina-san on top of that."

I was reluctant to leave South Beim wide open, but Fidel-san had already come in to take command.

The Guild personnel from Beim had already started their work, and the adventurers were collecting Magic Stones and materials in the Labyrinth.

Novem spoke.

"… Rauno-san and Innis-san migrated to South Beim as well. It seems Rauno-san will be heading for Cartaffs alongside you. It's already been explained to Vera-san, so he only has to board the ship. It's your first boat trip in a while."

She said first in a while, but what she meant was first trip with Vera in a while. I averted my eyes from Novem's words.

"That was a joke. It really was a joke to rile him up…"

Novem laughed a bit.

“Fidel-san really was looking forward to it, it seems. When he heard it was a joke after-the-fact he was making an extremely conflicted face. But… if it really was your firstborn, that would be a little troublesome. If male, there comes the possibility he would be your successor, and the Trēs House would achieve the position of having the legitimate heir. The Trēs House has its current standing, and if possible, it would be best if the firstborn be with the legal wife. All things considered, the ones who must be excluded from candidacy are Eva-san, May-chan, and Clara-san, perhaps? Because it’s easier for one of noble lineage to be recognized as successor.”

Novem was all smiles. Her tone was gentle. And yet, the fact I felt so cornered must be because it was my responsibility.

In order to rile Fidel-san, I had Vera play out a lie of pregnancy. As a result, Aria who was there at the time… I kissed Aria to form a line, and from it, Monica was also informed.

By the time I returned, Monica had prepared the goods to raise a child, and I was promptly surrounded by the female camp.

I was unlucky. From Galleria, Rusworth, and Cartaffs, Gracia-san, Elza-san, and Ludmilla-san were present as well.

“I’m sorry. Please forgive me. I don’t want to recall the events of that day anymore.”

I apologized to Novem, and she as well.

“I humbly apologize. I just… found myself a little jealous. It’s your problem as well, and I will abide your decision. But if you could take my words as a single opinion on the matter.”

I didn’t want to remember. I pushed the happenings of that day back to the past, and heard Novem’s apology, as I watched preparations go on.

“… I want to end it before Bahnseim floods into Beim.”

After Bahnseim issued a declaration of war, Beim had become quite

panicked.

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I stowed Porter away into the Seventh's Box, and taking Aria, Clara, Monica, Shannon… and Rauno-san along, I boarded the Trēs House vessel, the Vera Trēs.

My comrades had come to see us off from the port.

Novem, Miranda, Eva, May. Beside her, the one who'd gotten to working alongside her, Marina-san also saw us off.

Without his overcoat, in a dress shirt, Fidel-san boarded the ship.

Atop the deck, Vera talked to him.

"We'll be off, father."

"… Yeah, you must be careful. Since it's you, I've little to worry, but this time, you have that god of misfortune on board. When your chastity is in danger, make sure to aim straight, and pull the trigger."

Didn't he sound relatively serious there? As I thought that, Fidel-san directed hostility at me.

Vera sighed, and spoke.

"Good grief, give it up already. I've no intent to find a man besides Lyle. If Lyle's gone… you'll never get to see the cute face of your grandchildren. There's no saying you'll ever get to meet Gina's."

Fidel-san held his head.

"Dammit! Jokes about grandchildren are just going too far… each and every one of them, they're snatching my daughters away! I hate every man who'll lay a hand on my girls! They should just leave a

grandchild behind, and disappear!”

While I watched Fidel-san’s distress, the Third laughed in the Jewel.

『Fidel-kun is in peak condition today.』

The Seventh sounded satisfied.

『He’s quite a talent. The more you work him up, the brighter he shines.』

When Fidel-san disembarked, he was glaring at me. And when he was down, the gangplank was unfastened, and Vera came to my side.

“Lyle, we’ll be heading straight for Galleria and Rusworth. We’ll be set for Cartaffs right after, but after that, you’ll be taking a land route, right? Do you have everything you need together?”

To her worry, I spoke.

“Don’t worry. Clara and Monica confirmed it. And if we don’t have enough, we can buy along the way.”

I had ceased being an adventurer, but the Guilds across the lands would still buy off monster materials from me.
If we couldn’t avoid monster battles, defeating them, and collecting their drops… selling them off was a possible way to procure funds.

Monica spoke to Vera.

“This Monica is beside him, so your worries are unfounded. And just when I thought I could look after this liar… chicken dickwad’s dear chicks.

Vera gave a bitter smile. Monica was relatively delighted when she heard I had a child, it seems.

Aria sighed.

“You know as well as I that Lyle’s doomed a virgin, right? Then how do you misunderstand him having children? Are you sure you

aren't broken after all?"

On Aria's words, Monica shook up her twin tails.

"But the chicken took flight in the wars of Galleria and Rusworth, did he not!? There's the surprisingly high possibility he was getting busy!"

Aria's gaze pierced into me.

"… So you really think I'm that skillful?"

There, Aria nodded satisfactorily.

"That's right. It's Lyle after all, so that isn't happening. I mean, he's a virgin."

Laughed at by Aria, as I was coming to terms with it, Clara quietly.

"Though Aria-san isn't any better."

The air turned awkward, and Clara alone produced a book from her bag, and began reading through it.

Shannon watched as the ship began to move.

"… I'm quite nervous with these members."

She said.

Various Journeys

The Skill… Speed's… effect.

It was a Skill to elevate movement speed. It was a simple speed increase, but the proportion it rose by changed largely by my abilities.

Compared to the twenty percent, thirty at most it was at the beginning, now it was possible to achieve a boost close to double that. Though doing so raised a problem of intense Mana consumption. But even so, managing somehow with my increased Mana pool, we reached Galleria's port.

"Lyle-dono!"

Younger than me, and once unreliable and untrusted by the knights, right now the boy had piled up his own achievements, and got his surroundings to follow him.

The real rule-ignoring fight between Galleria and Rusworth that suddenly broke out. After earning achievements there, small as they were, he was able to perform on a domestic front.

The responsibility for developing the port had also come under Leold-kun's name.

"It's been a while. A few months perhaps? No, around a month, right?"

When I recalled the last time we'd met, Leold-kun gave a wry smile.

"Less than two months, at least. My sister was unable to make time in her schedule, so she can't come out to greet you this time."

Gracia-san… Galleria's Grand Duke Proxy had talks with the envoy from the four country alliance, it seems, and she couldn't move.

"From Lorphys?"

I guessed the country that sent the envoy, and Leold-kun nodded.

The strong salty breeze made the port feel a little cold. We were guided by him to our arranged lodging facility.

There were many buildings under development, and it was an environment where you could hear the working voices of workers around. It felt quite energetic.

Leold-kun spoke to me.

“The new Trēs House head from Beim came by. I sent him back, but I felt a little bit sorry for him.

Seeing Leold-kun a little anxious, the Third in the Jewel spoke with a lower toned voice than usual.

『Yep, he’s a good kid. But making that face is troubling. Fidel-kun worked hard, and he’s going to keep working hard, so this much is a reward, or rather, we have to honor our promises…』

He was used for our sake, but the ancestors left in the Jewel couldn’t help but see Leold-kun as a radiant existence.

If I said something similar, they’d go, ‘naive’, or ‘survival of the fittest, kid’, yet they were soft on Leold-kun. I’m sure it felt as if the innocence they lost was being shown off to them.

And for all practical purposes, Leold-kun had a straightforward personality.

“But I also have circumstance of my own. For now, I’d prefer leaving some distance from the current Beim. It seems Bahnseim has declared war on them, and their move will likely come when autumn turns to winter.”

Even for a country on Bahnseim’s level, a large force would be needed to drop Beim. And a majority of their military force came from their populace.

Autumn was the harvest period, and precisely because the country was so large, there was a delicate deviation in harvest time across it. To move a large force, of course, food supplies, and manpower were necessary.

They couldn't move in a busy time. Or even if they did they wouldn't be able to take Beim, so we surmised.

If perhaps… Celes did move, it was most convenient we weren't in Beim. I told Vera to distance herself if Celes showed signs of movement as well.

Leold-kun crossed his arms, and spoke his thoughts aloud.

"… Will Bahnseim move, I wonder? Speaking only to scale, they should have less numbers than the army of monsters that flowed into Beim at present, so will they be held down at Fortress Redant?"

The Jewel. The Fifth denied Leold-kun's estimates.

『Monsters and humans are different, after all. It's true the force to break through a monster army is fearsome, but I think humans are the scarier bunch… They'll probably get passed the Fortress at an early stage.』

I conveyed that opinion to Leold-kun. It was a fortress we prepared for Beim's war with Bahnseim, but we didn't build it thinking it would be able to hold them off.

"No, Fortress Redant will be breached relatively quickly."

"Eh? But it's a Fortress that stopped a flock of several hundred thousand monsters. And I heard you held it down with less than twenty thousand men."

There was a large difference between me and other people.

It was the ancestors' wisdom… and the Skills they left. The Walt House manifested nothing but Support Class Skills, leading the body they developed over the ages to be a body excelling in Support.

By the Skill succession starting with our Founder, it was surely a blessing there were no duplicate Skills.

I was gripping the Jewel before I knew it.

"… That was because the Skills I inherited were proficient ones."

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Night.

Dropping by the Jewel, I saw the Jewel sitting irate atop the round table.

With a refreshing expression, sitting in the Fifth's chair, Milleia-san was being glared at.

『Oy. Let me pass my Skill onto Lyle already. I said what I wanted to say, and more than anything, the Third Stage of my Skill will be useful hereon.』

Milleia-san looked at that Fifth, and let out a sigh.

『You sure aren't honest. You haven't imparted the important things. From the Founder to the Third, if you had to say, the Walt House were feudal nobles of the countryside. Among them were some who stressed their households. Then why did my father, the Fifth make such a sudden upheaval? You didn't properly tell him.』

The Fifth's eyebrow twitched, and he looked over Milleia-san.

『Then why don't you? Does me teaching him such a thing hold any real meaning?』

Within that tense air, the Third and Seventh were shrugging their shoulders. I sighed at their exchange, and stuck a word in to change the topic.

"Could I have a moment? Tomorrow, we'll depart from Galleria, and head for Rusworth. After that, we'll set out for Cartaffs, and our sea routes will be over. Since things are going smoothly for now, could I get some sparring in?"

The reason I brought my feet to the Jewel was to spar with the ancestors. I had been too busy, and I didn't have that leisure for a

while.

I thought there was a necessity to train while I had the time. And the Fifth was thinking of ending his role, and disappearing. Milleia-san had denied it, but I couldn't say when he was going to go.

The Seventh couldn't stand the air anymore, as he stood from his seat.

『Then I'll take you on. Lyle, follow me.』

With those words, he tried to head for his room, when one of the doors was violently slammed open.

… It was my room.

With a grinning face identical to mine, stood LYLE.

『Heard you were bored, so here I am. Everyone's adorable LYLE. Now, Lyle! Have a match with me! If you win, I'll return your memories!』

Seeing my younger years set himself in a cool pose, my head started to hurt. I would definitely never do such a thing. When I thought that, and tried to say something, Milleia-san opened her mouth.

『Good goddess. You're way too stubborn, father. There's no helping it then. Lyle's room of memories is, in a sense, the Jewel's room as well. I'm going to go through it to peek into your memories.』

On such words, LYLE made a reluctant face.

『Eh～? What about me? Milleia-san, that's tyranny. And you know, does he really need any more Skills? With as many as he has, Lyle has plenty, and I think there's more value in an advisor role.』

On LYLE's words, Milleia-san shook her head to the side.

『And what does relying on dead men forever accomplish? To defeat Celes, there are plenty of things Lyle will have to know.』

LYLE folded both hands behind his head. And he looked at Milleia-san, and spoke.

『My thoughts differ from yours, Milleia-san, and the will of the Jewel. I plan on saving my family.』

“Saving?”

I looked at him, and thought over the meaning of his words. Did he mean just as he said, or was he implying something else.

Thinking a bit, it sounded as if he wanted me to free them from Celes’ curse. But if it meant just as he said it…

The Seventh looked at LYLE, and made a clenched fist.

『LYLE, what do you mean by save? Don’t you know? It’s already impossible to atone for the things Maizel and Claire have done…』

Even if Celes was the source, would the surroundings accept it just like that? Celes was bad. So no one else has any sin. If such a thing worked, then I wouldn’t even have to aim for emperor. Defeat Celes with a few elites, and everything would solve itself.

But reality was different. Abnormal. The worst.

LYLE looked up at the ceiling.

『… Even so, I’ll save them. That’s my wish as well. I know not of the Jewel’s will, or the ancestors’ of Milleia-san’s thoughts on the matter. It’s my personal intention.』

The silent Third kept his head down.

The Fifth didn’t try to open his mouth. The Seventh was the same. But he was looking at LYLE with a conflicted expression. Milleia-san spoke.

『… I get it. Then get your business over with first. Father’s matter can wait ‘til later.』

The Fifth spoke unpleasantly.

『You're still bringing that up…』

The Jewel's atmosphere was worse than ever before.

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I opened my eyes in the Gallerian lodging house.

The cold of nights and mornings had come out. I felt it was a little brisk, but there was another blanket draped over mine, and that felt pleasantly warm.

It seems Monica had prepared the other one. The individual herself wasn't in the room, and it seems she was out.

I raised my upper half, and surely enough, felt the cold on my skin.

"… It's getting troublesome. Even when we're about to go on a full-blown trip."

Rusworth, and then Cartaffs.

We would enter Bahnseim from Cartaffs, and head for Faunbeux. It was a considerable distance, and we would be traversing it with this horrid air in the Jewel.

And I was forcibly sent to deal with LYLE… and even roped into his competition.

At present, I had experienced Growth six times. It was definitely on the high side. But if you asked if I could win against him, that wasn't the case.

The movement technique Celes used. Milleia-san could do it too.

I wouldn't say that alone was enough for him to match Celes, but the me that existed before Celes stole everything away… he was plenty a threat.

“Was I that amazing before? Could it be I’d just forgotten… no, I did hear this and that was taken from me…”

Could mere stealing really create that much a difference? With that on my mind, I left the bed, and stretched. Monica entered the room with a bucket in hand.

It seems she had prepared hot water.

“Oh, you were awake? When I thought I was finally going to crawl under your blankets, and induce a misunderstanding into the next person that stopped by. You’ve got to read the mood more.”

“When you’re doing morning preparations, even if you say that, you’ve not a fragment of persuasive power. You can quit with the usual jokes, get ready soon. Because we have to reach Rusworth’s port within the day. Where’re Aria, Shannon and Clara?”

When I said that, Monica set down the bucket on the floor, and brought over a chair. She looked ay my face, and tilted her head.

“Why do I have to look after the chicken’s women as well? If you ask me to do it, I will, but putting this Monica… to look after other women…”

As she began to shed crocodile tears, I hit her head, and her golden twin tails softly swayed.

“Ow. ‘Twas a joke, was it not? Aria-san and the others are still asleep. They’re tired out from the boat trip.”

Our sea voyage would continue for a few more days, so I thought over what was to come.

“We have to rest when we can. Clara is one thing, but please look after Shannon. She doesn’t have any stamina.”

I thought Shannon would be the first to suffer seasickness on this trip. Monica seemed to be mindful as well.

“The nutritional balance of our meals is perfect. But if our movement continues, it will expend our health, so I can’t say much

to that. But Shannon has shown a relative rise in physical fitness as of late."

Hearing that, I touched a hand to my chin.

"… She was so bad to start with, that even living normally built up her stamina, huh."

"Exactly."

Monica agreed.

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… Atop a ship.

Moving separate from Lyle's party, Miranda watched the sailors working on deck.

It wasn't a Trēs House ship. They had made south, and had chosen a route through a foreign country into Bahnseim.

Perhaps because they had gone south, the wind was warm.

Miranda grasped the hand rail, and looked at the sky. A blue sky spread out, and she could see land in the distance.

"Shannon, are you getting by alright?"

Worrying for her sister Shannon, Miranda stroked her hair shaking in the wind with her fingertips.

Shannon had said herself that she would stick with Lyle. Originally, she would have accompany Miranda, or wait for them back at South Beim. It was certain her physical state was better than before, but compared to the others, there was a horrible gap.

Thinking Shannon was thinking over things her own way, Miranda respected her will.

Miranda was worried for Shannon, but she was also thinking of the southern lands.

"… We have a letter from the alliance and Cartaffs, but how much will they trust us."

To the south, there was a single country bordering Bahnseim. Its land was too vast to call a small country, but its scale was dubious to call large.

It was one of the countries carrying out dealings with Beim, but starting with Miranda, it was a country not a single one of them had any familiarity with.

They had letters of introduction from the merchant companies the country did business with, so they would probably be able to meet the king.

"Well, let's just do our best. If it doesn't work out, we'll still enter Bahnseim, and search for info there."

This time, the lord of the southern country was male. Even if they were female, Miranda's party would've been sent regardless.

But even if the number of rivals increased, if they didn't win, there'd be no future. And it was a fact their power was still insufficient to defeat Celes.

"If he gets Faunbeux's assistance, the way things are going, we'll be at fifty percent of Bahnseim, if not a little less. We have to increase the number of cooperating countries a bit more."

And even if he obtained their cooperation, he eventually planned to rule above them as an empire. Miranda found it awkward.

"… So submission to Celes, or governance by Lyle. When you think of how both sides are Walts, the future of the continent lies in Walt House hands regardless. What a troublesome family."

Saying that, Miranda laughed a bit…

Faction

Heading to Bahnseim through route of Fortress Redant, Adele and Maksim poked their heads out of the specially-prepared wagon's tent stuck over its loading tray.

The horses were chokered, and those were Magic Tools. They raised their stamina and movement speed, having a sort of enhancement Skill carved into them.

For the wagon as well, the blacksmith and Monica had put some work into it, so the ride wasn't bad. Around, robed Valkyries sat.

Silently, in the loading tray, Maksim looked forward. The coachwoman was also a Valkyrie, so he didn't have anything to do.

"… Adele-sama, it sure is quiet."

Maksim called over to Adele, as she checked the map. Without taking her eyes off of it, Adele answered.

"They're just staying silent, and they actually are capable of conversation, it seems. Going through Lyle-san, Monica-san is the one getting the group together. It's become quite a strange transitive."

Strange didn't just mean embarrassing. On the occasion that Adele's party caused a problem, it meant Lyle would be informed of it.

It was an important time, and if they did fail, then Lyle's party may cut them off. If they took any traitorous actions, their powerful allies, the Valkyries would be pointing their blades their ways, she noticed.

Lyle usually felt somewhat out of it, but he had a strange severe side to him. Young as he was, he wasn't an upfront foe, he had a tendency for the back door. Adele and Maksim both appraised him highly for that.

"I'll be careful. But with war declared by Bahnseim, Beim is quite lacking in tension, or how should I put it…"

Maksim touched a hand to his jaw, as he thought back to Fortress Redant. Naturally enough, there were loads of merchants who took routes through it. Because of that, there weren't even any commute regulations on it. A merchant-like policy.

And while Bahnseim had declared war, it wasn't a season for them to move. From those circumstances, they couldn't help but lack tension.

"Does Beim intend to win?"

Adele let out a sigh.

"… They've got a lot of countries dancing on their palms, after all. Perhaps they're making light of the situation. And they have many with high individual power. The aptitude of the adventurers who trained up in the Labyrinth are the real deal. With that in their eyes, perhaps the merchants are making light of Bahnseim."

Maksim crossed his arms, and looked down a bit. While formerly something of a vassal in Bahnseim, he was still once a knight. And he was called one of the greater knights of Bahnseim.

The others knights like him who'd persisted on with their beliefs had been defeated by Celes, so he knew how far his abilities fell short of hers to a detestable extent.

And as he wasn't in a position to get revenge, Maksim relied on Lyle in Beim.

But the time had finally come to move from the city of merchants. Irritated at Beim's underestimation of Celes' ability, as everything was going according to plan, Maksim was filled with inexplicable sentiment.

"Monsters and humans are different. I do hope they don't group battles with monsters together with war."

Adele raised her face from the map, and looked at Maksim's face.

"By the moment they notice that, it'll be too late."

What the two of them set off for was the anti-Walt House… now with Celes, it had composed itself as the anti-Royal's feudal lord territories of Bahnseim.

A number of houses crushed, it felt as if the entire country had gotten a clean sweep. But in actuality, Centralle's army, and the royal faction centered around the Walt House were still going around crushing opposing powers one after the next.

In all of that, Adele had to look into the territories that weren't showing any movements.

"Let's also gather info within Bahnseim. We'll head for the territories resisting. Based on how it goes, aid may be necessary. If all goes well in the South, we'll be able to send support packages from north and south. The northern Cartaffs isn't a problem, but it would be nice if the south's… 【Djanpear】would cooperate with us."

Adele prayed Novem's group in the south would be successful in getting the country's assistance.

Maksim spoke.

"And let's also hope there are feudal lords who will assist us. If possible, some info on Centralle as well. I hope we can get as far as Dalien."

The territory he named was Dalien, where Lyle and Novem had first become adventurers…

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Departing Galleria, and heading for Rusworth.

But because of an envoy from Lorphys, I was unable to meet Elza-san either. So we set right off for Cartaffs, and descending from the ship at Cartaffs' port, we made for the castle.

This was where we'd part with Vera.

"Lyle, make sure you properly return alive. Without letting anyone die. There's no point if you don't survive victory."

Hearing that from Vera, I scratched my face with a finger, and nodded.

"I know."

From the start, I didn't intend to kill Celes even if it was the death of me. Winning and living on was my promise to my ancestors.

"Rather than a dead hero, I'll aim for the grand villain who survived."

When I said that, she laughed a bit.

"Very well. As long as you're alive, then grand villain it is. I'll accompany you down to hell."

As I felt bashful on those words, the Third spoke up.

『… She's a good kid.』

He said.

Behind me, my comrades with the minimum luggage were waiting. Aria put away her spear, with a sword hanging at her hip. She wasn't laden with anything, in a state she could fight at any time.

"Lyle, hurry up with it. The knights are waiting."

At the end of her sights, the knights at station were waiting. Seeing that, Clara held her large staff against her shoulder, and lightly pushed up her glasses with her left hand.

"They're restless. Perhaps they're worried about the time."

There, Vera spoke to me.

"I can't let you keep the queen waiting. It'll being trouble to you. Then it'll be goodbye for a while. You're definitely coming back."

With those words, closing one eye in a wink, Vera headed for the ship. She raised her right hand to wave, and while she wasn't looking my way, I waved as well.

And as I headed for the carriage, Monica spoke tiredly.

"Chicken dickwad. We're down one. Just look at her… how terrible."

The one with a pale face was Shannon. Perhaps she had been unable to sleep at night, but she had been up the whole way, coupled with sea sickness, resulting in a horrible condition.

"… Treat me better. I'm a patient right now."

I covered my face with my left hand.

"I've suddenly grown anxious about this trip. Shannon, when we go to the castle, you have to get some rest at once. Monica, please keep close to her, and look after her."

There, Monica made a reluctant face.

"If it's an order, I'll do it. Though I seriously don't want to. Since it's the chicken's orders…"

Watching my exchange with Monica, Aria walked ahead.

"Now hurry on. Lyle, carry Shannon."

Aria had to stay light in case anything happened, and leaving it to small-built Clara would draw eyes. Monica was carrying baggage, so of course, the job went to me.

"… Do you want me to carry you over a shoulder? Or a piggy back?"

When I joked around, Shannon grinned through her pale face.

"Just you try it. If it feels I'm going to barf, I'll throw it all up on you."

It felt she really would do it, so I decided for a princess cradle where I could see it coming.

A little away, Rauno-san looked at us as he shook his head.

“So this is the party of Beim’s hero. How laid back.”

I laughed.

“Isn’t it fine? If we felt nervous here, we’d never hold up.”

There, Rauno-san laughed.

“Why of course… I’m not going to the castle, so I’ll be off in town. We’ll meet up at the gate on departure day.”

“Understood.

As I nodded, Rauno-san split off.

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… Walking down the castle town, Rauno erased his presence.

There were knights around who knew his face, and he didn’t want to show them the current him. As a knight, he was called a disgrace by the previous king, and basically chased from the country.

To avoid any trouble, he erased his presence with a Skill, and walked.

At that moment.

He heard a loud voice from the bar.

“Cut the crap! To hell with, save me, and become king! Is her majesty alright in the head? Offer our loyalty to that brat? Don’t take us for fools!”

It hadn't been officially announced that Lyle would be taken as a groom. But at the castle, her majesty Ludmilla was quite open about it. The rumors instantly spread, and it felt as if it was purposely spread.

(Their complaints are natural. How Lyle's party will move… I should tell them.)

In order to precisely convey info, Rauno hid his body, and listened in.

"Come to think of it, did you know Rauno was in 'is party that day?"

When one of the three-man-drunk knights said that, another's eyebrow moved. Perhaps one of them was young, as they didn't know about Rauno.

"Who's that?"

"The knights' disgrace. He uses a skill that's pretty much peeping, and calmly does the dirtiest things. Last king said he wasn't worthy to be a knight, and drove 'im out. Coulda executed 'im too."

Hearing the opinion of a standard knight wasn't enough to agitate Rauno. Dirty work was left as his responsibility.

And when that came to light, he was exiled. Many knights recognized him as an atrocious knight.

"'e'll use a guy like that. No doubt that Lyle guy's a dirty one. Beim's hero? If he were Cartaffs-born, even if he were a knight, he'd be lucky to get the menial labor."

Getting a bloated ego from his drink, the three knights let out their complaints. Seeing them, Rauno let out a sigh.

And in that, one of them spoke.

"Ah~ if only I'd have saved the queen, then I'd be king by now."

Rauno wanted to give a bitter smile. Without a single action taken

to save her, or the slightest bit of info gathered, on top of letting Larc do as he pleased. Remembering all that made him want to burst into laughter. Sarcastic laughter.

And after hearing a few more complaints, and seeing their conversation go full circle, he walked off. Thinking them the words of drunks, he couldn't help but be somewhat mindful of it, as he felt his homeland grow cold to him.

(It's colder than Beim. We're north, so I guess there's no helping it.)

And feeling that cold, Rauno disappeared into a crowd….

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… In a room of the castle, Aria and Clara sat to Lyle's sides.

Splendid food lined the table, and an orchestra was performing to welcome them.

Around were maids, and knights for guarding, while before Lyle's eyes, Ludmilla sat in a conspicuously extravagant chair and folded her legs.

She put her lips to a glass of wine, and after sipping only a little, she parted it. That action was fascinating.

Aria looked at Ludmilla, and felt just a little jealous.

(Since she was called the princess knight, I thought she'd be cruder.)

Compared with herself, it looked as if every one of her opponents exceeded her.

Ludmilla opened her mouth.

"Is the food to your tastes?"

Lyle smiled.

“Yes, it’s extremely delicious. Being treated to such a welcome, on the contrary, it actually makes me feel apologetic.”

Ludmilla smiled a bit.

“It’s for my future husband. We’ll at least do this much.”

She boldly declared Lyle her future husband, and she didn’t seem perturbed at all. Aria looked at Lyle. He was smiling, but that she felt his smile was mildly strained was because of all the time she’d spent with him.

All the way from Dalien. Excluding Novem, Aria had been with Lyle the longest.

(We’ve been together for more than a year. It went by in the blink of an eye.)

When winter passed, and spring came, it would already be two years. She was a year older than Lyle, and about to turn eighteen.

She hadn’t slackened in maintaining her red hair, but even so she was an adventurer. There couldn’t help but be times where she was unable to, and from the start, her personality wasn’t one to care for it so thoroughly. Her skin was also more tanned than before, and she was giving off the feel of an adventurer.

She had gained more wounds that wouldn’t fade, and when compared to Ludmilla, Aria couldn’t help but feel a sense of inferiority.

There, Ludmilla looked at her.

“A bath has been prepared. Today, take it easy, and heal the fatigue from your trip. And… I have something I’d like to talk about with the two of you over there.”

The ones Ludmilla designated were Aria and Clara…

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… Clara answered Ludmilla's invitation, and accompanied Aria to the bath.

In that large bathing area, a bath that looked like it had been carved out of solid stone was bestowed with sculptures, with gold ornaments adorning them.

It was a huge bathing… but the only one who usually used it was Ludmilla. There were female knights standing keeping quiet around, acting as guards.

The surrounding scenery… with much to steal one's eyes away, Clara and Aria's eyes were directed at Ludmilla's body.

She had been wearing an outfit with a low degree of exposure, so they hadn't noticed it. But Ludmilla's body also had many scars, and it was quite a painful figure.

"You're prettier than I thought. That Lyle averted his eyes when he saw my body, so I thought he had some unconventional preferences, but that doesn't look to be the case. Seems I can hold some expectations."

Laughing, Ludmilla submerged herself in the tub, and stretched out her legs. She had lowered herself onto the stone steps leading into it, so it looked as if she was sitting in a seat.

Seeing her painful form, both Clara and Aria swallowed their breath. As she'd fought as a knight, those wounds were surely all over her body. No, perhaps it was only natural for them to be there.

"… You've got quite… a few scars."

When Clara said that, Ludmilla smiled.

"I used to be quite strong-willed, you see. Like hell I'd lost to any man, I'd say as I went out front and troubled my subordinates. Finding yourself on the brink of death a number of times makes you

notice a few things. Back then, I never even thought I would end up as queen."

Wearing black clothing stuck so close to her skin, not showing much of her bare skin seemed to be to hide the wounds.

And Ludmilla spoke a little embarrassed.

"I think I've said it before, but I approve of mistresses. That's the extent of a man he is. I want to monopolize, but with the size of his goal, I'm sure that's impossible. And so… will the two of you lend me your power?"

On the call to action, Clara was confused.

"Um, by that, do you mean…"

When Aria nervously asked, Ludmilla made a dark smile as she spoke.

"That's right. A faction. More than ten members, and there are going to be more henceforth, right? Then it's only natural for me to hold a faction of my own."

Clara thought over what she should do.

(Build a faction able to oppose Novem-san and Miranda-san? What a pain.)

Seeing their silence, Ludmilla spoke.

"Well, just think over it. I'll offer better conditions than the others. Because Cartaffs is a large country, after all. And I've bad affinity with those women of Rusworth and Galleria. If our countries are entangled, it is inevitable we shan't get along."

Aria was troubled. Naturally, Clara was as well. From how boldly she declared it, they were scared at not knowing the standards for which they were chosen. Clara asked.

"You don't think we could already be of another faction?"

Ludmilla spoke as if seeing through it.

“I think you are. But you don’t have a clear allegiance yet, right? If you made such a thing at the present stage, that party of yours would crumble at once.”

Aria stood. Showing off her trained body, and letting her large breasts sway.

“Then why bring it out with this timing!?”

Ludmilla spoke with a serious expression.

“… It’s not like I’ve any intentions to get in the way. But the witches of Rusworth and Galleria. They’re bad news. On top of not being accustomed to men, they don’t understand men in their essence. Their desire to monopolize instantly comes out. In that case, they’ll definitely drag his feet. In all actuality, if Lorphys hadn’t moved to get in the way, they may have lain hands on Lyle. And if it ended like that, it wouldn’t have been interesting for you, right?”

It seems Ludmilla was involved in the conveniently timed envoys from Lorphys.

Clara thought back to the words Novem handed down.

‘Please protect Lyle-sama’s chastity. I don’t mind if you use Aria-san and Monica-san.’

She had said. Novem was wary of it, and Ludmilla was as well.

Ludmilla looked at Clara’s face.

“So you knew as well? Well, it matters not. It seems the balance has barely been preserved up to now, but can you say that about it forever? Personally, I don’t want such a grand plan twisted by women problems. I won’t force you to join a faction. But I’d be happy if you’d cooperate without getting in the way.”

Seeing Ludmilla’s smile, Aria was dumbfounded. Clara knew she didn’t have enough strength to hold the female camp down, and it’s

not as if she had full trust towards Novem.

After looking down a bit.

“Understood. I will assist.”

Ludmilla laughed, while Aria looked at Clara with a surprised face.

“I’m thankful. I looked into you, and from the moment I did, I wanted to have you by my side.”

It seems Ludmilla had looked into Clara. That would mean she called out to her knowing full well.

Aria looked at Clara with an unsatisfied expression.

“Clara, you…”

In the bath devoid of Lyle, the women were gradually increasing the scale of the strife to come…

What did I Want?

Room of memories.

It was a space where the ancestor and Jewel could recreate scenes of the past.

Mansions, yards, battlefields, reproducing a number of things, the ancestors showed me their memories.

Like the Walt House's unexpected start, and what they were thinking as they acted; it was all recorded by the Jewel. As it continued doing.

In such a room of records, I was running about the mansion yard. With the Skills… Speed, Map, Search, Field, Limit Burst… various skills simultaneously active, I ran from place to place to avoid the magic raining down.

What carved out the tidy lawn was a rain of lightning showers from above.

There had always been a statue of a lady in that yard, and sitting on her shoulder, a younger me… LYLE kicked his feet up and down as he used magic.

"H-how in the!?"

Rolling across the ground, I got to my feet, and burst off again. Whenever magic hit the ground, it would raise an explosion, preventing me from running properly.

And the reason I was running was because, even if I attacked, my attacks were all dealt with.

『Hey, we've only just begun here. Yet you've already been fatally wounded thrice… as I thought, you really should give that body back.』

Seeing that grinning childish face of mine, even if it was my own, I was irritated. I spread my left hand, and created flames to activate

magic.

From top to bottom, I swung my hand as if to throw it, and the ball of flame headed for him.

“Fire bullet!”

My magic that was only on the level of harassment, with the Second’s Skill Select, I had fine-tuned for it to definitely hit LYLE.

Seeing that, LYLE let out a sigh, as he swung the sabre in his hand to cut the fireball apart.

『You’re too honest in going straight for the vitals. If you really want to do that, you have to hit them faster. Or otherwise… Select.』

On LYLE’s mutterings, lightning came down towards me from the sky. I immediately checked where it would impact, and as I ran a route to avoid it…

“Oh, damn. He baited me!”

『You’re slow on the uptake. Though if you tried to endure the other one, you’d be in tatters regardless. If this were reality, it’d have been fatal.』

Having moved to where I turned to run, LYLE thrust his sabre out at me. I parried it with a Katana, and went straight into a kick.

Lightly landing on top of my foot, he looked at me, grinned, and kicked up as well. By that young boy’s foot to my chin, my field of vision was sent to the sky, and I collapsed on the ground.

“W-why can you use Skills…”

I unsteadily tried to rise, but my head was spinning, and I couldn’t stand. A fighting style different from the ancestors, and the ability to use the Skills up to their last levels.

『Because you and me are the same. I’m you, and you’re me. So the Jewel will let me use the Skills as well. I’ll just throw this out there,

but I'm undoubtedly worse at using the Skills than their respective ancestors. I'm just making clever use of them.』

LYLE looked over my incapacitated state, and laughed as he leaned down.

『When you have such amazing Skills on you, you haven't mastered them. I'm not talking about training the Skills. It's only natural to fall short of the individuals who manifested them. But you've got to time them better, and use them more craftily.』

When I forced myself to stand, LYLE tripped me up, and had me roll.

『That's all for today. Next… go to the Fifth's room.』

I looked up at the familiar sky of the memories, vexed that I couldn't even beat this child.

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The round table room.

When I dropped in, the Third was looking at Milleia-san with a grin.

『So even your prided eyes can't see through my illusions. You're such a scatterbrain, Milleia-chan.』

Seeing him chuckle as he put a hand to his mouth, Milleia-sann made a displeased expression.

Her hand was gripping a handgun, and the room smelled faintly of gunpowder.

I looked at the Fifth sitting on the table.

"What happened?"

The Fifth looked uninterested, but it seems he had properly been

observing everything that transpired. He gave me a courteous explanation.

『The Third riled Millea up. Well, since she suddenly started giving us orders, maybe that irritated him. Or perhaps he just wanted to tease her… she pointed her gun at him, but what she beautifully shot through happened to be an illusion.』

Hearing the Third had riled her up, I mused over how rare it was for birds of a feather to feud as I looked over the two. I ignored the Seventh, who looked a little disappointed in his chair.

The Third continued chuckling.

『Milleia-chan, Milleia-chan. You kept bragging about those demon eyes, so could it have been on purpose? Did you miss on purpose? You don't have to be so thoughtful just because I'm your great grandfather. Lookie, I'm over here. Try and hit me.』

To the Third with his arms spread wide, Milleia-san turned her empty left hand. There, while I didn't see her pull one out, she was gripping a gun, and she pulled the trigger…

『Kuh!』

… The Third, from the space he was shot, made a crooked smile as he faded away.

『Ahahaha, I'm over here. You don't have to be so angry.』

The righteous general who spread the Walt House's name through Bahnseim… and far across foreign lands. The Hero of Remlrandt was leading Milleia-saw about by the nose.

Milleia-san shot again and again. And as she tossed aside one gun after the next, the laughs of the Third echoed around the room.

A stray shot hit the Seventh.

『Ow!』

The Fifth looked at that, let out a sigh, leapt from the table, and

beckoned to me.

『Lyle, it's noisy out here, so come over for a bit.』

Invited by the Fifth, I headed for his room of memories.

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In the past.
In his room, I had seen the events surrounding May, and the family's problems.

With a philosophical look on his face, the Fifth sighed, snapped his fingers, and changed the surrounding scenery. The gray images projected the inside of the Walt House, gradually gaining their color.

In it all, there was a woman of small build, preciously holding a baby.

Distanced in age, the Fourth… Max looked on with a smile.

『Max, it's a boy! A boy!』

Happy that she had a boy, the woman gave a full smile. What I had seen of her standing dauntingly towards the Fourth and criticizing him left so strong an impression, I found it surprising.

『Yeah, with this, the Walt House is secure.』

Max looked delighted, but the woman… Max's wife's expression changed.

『What are you talking about? There's no telling what will happen in the world. This child needs some brothers and sisters. Hey, Fredricks! When you get brothers and sisters who'll support you, you've got to treasure them.』

Max gave a bitter smile.

『So in the end, you went with my suggestion of 【Fredricks】, huh? Makes a man happy.』

The woman's face turned red.

『T-that's… because I'm going to name the next one! Fredricks, what name do you think sounds good for your younger brother and sister?』

His wife held the baby's cheek to her own. Max watched over it with a smile.

『Right. Father did die young. Originally, I was supposed to have some younger siblings of my own.』

The third was the sole war-casualty of the Walt House. He had overturned a hopeless situation, but what he lost in exchange was his life.

The Fifth looked upon the scene.

『I haven't the slightest idea what Milleia wants me to show you. There are plenty of things I don't want to show, but if I say that, then I'll be staying here forever. I'm happy I got to see how May's grown, but having things as they are for ages to come is, you know…』

Saying that, the Fifth explained the scene. It was either the Fourth's memory, or a record from the Jewel, but it was without a doubt, the moment of his birth.

And at the point, it didn't seem likely he would end up an only child. Both Max and his wife were already thinking about the next one.

The couple's relationship, from how scared the Fourth was, I thought it would be terrible, but that didn't seem to be the case.

… In that case, the cause had to be that 'accident' the Fourth spoke of.

The Fifth looked over the warm family scene as he spoke. Around, the maids looked upon the rejoicing woman with gentle smiles. Outside the door, the knights clenched their fists for joy.

Watching that scene…

『Lyle. How does this scenery look to you? Is it strange? Or is it normal?』

Having heard those words, I.

“Um… isn’t it normal? Everyone looks happy, and the Fourth and his wife look extremely delighted as well.”

The Firth, a little tiredly.

『That’s right. By your time, the house had the leisure to think of it that way. We were a Baron House at the time. Climbing by the Third’s achievements, we had only just become true nobles. The Walt House was an upstart backed with momentum. And that’s surely why. This scene was a rare one.』

What he explained was the lifeform that was nobles.

『Did you know? The marriages of nobles are the links between houses.』

“I know. No, I was going to learn.”

Hearing my response, the Fifth smiled a little sorrowfully.

『Should I think it a good thing, or get angry at the fact you don’t know… perhaps that’s my fault. I tried seeking a warm household for Fiennes, and failed. Because I had shoved family love, and the obligations of nobles into it. It seems Brod went alright, and the Walt House shouldered the whole burden of it.』

The Sixth married the women he loved. But at the same time, he took on mistresses like the Fifth. The legal wife was quite angry about that.

The Fifth taught me the side of the Sixth I didn’t know about.

『That guy didn't have to try and imitate me. No matter what you do, if there are merits, there will be demerits as well. I had increased the family, so he didn't have to worry about that anymore… but after taking a wife, he instantly went right out to get mistresses. I was extremely anxious. But despite how worried I was over what his wife he met through marriage interview thought, he put it to practice as if he thought it was only natural.』

Seeing the Fifth cradle his head, I thought it was surely troubling at the time. It seems the Fifth held some dissatisfaction at the Sixth as well.

If you'll let me have my say, isn't it because he was looking at you? The Third once said you come to resemble the one you hate.

The scene changed, now a fidgeting young Sixth… Fiennes' figure. He looked greatly perplexed before a high-class woman of blond hair and blue eyes. An aged Fredricks was also holding his head.

The Fifth looked at the woman, with disheveled hair, throwing and breaking anything that she could lay her hands on. Just looking at that, it looked as if the woman was the worse.
But…

『That girl was the daughter of an imperial noble. She married into the provincial Walt House, but that's because the Sixth gave her a passionate confession. And so she came to the mansion, and tried her best in her own way. There were times she wanted to cry in this unfamiliar environment, but she endured through… then you see, that guy boldly…』

The surrounding scenes sprung to action. Fiennes avoided a thrown vace.

『W-what's wrong with mistresses!? With the Walt House's scale, that much is…』

The woman cried out.

『You said you'd only love me alone! I believed in you! And yet… and yet!』

A thrown decorative plate hit Fiennes on the mark, but I couldn't' sympathize with him.

The Fifth sighed.

『… To have her calm down, I heard out her story after that. It seems she was resolved from the moment she was born into a noble House. To marry a man she didn't love, and have children… a man wouldn't understand, but I'm sure it's harsh. But being confessed love to, and married was something out of her dreams. The difference in environment, was something she wanted to overcome for the sake of the love Fiennes offered her, it seems. What was natural here was plenty strange in Centralle. And what Fiennes did to answer her hard work, was introduce her to other women.』

The fact he surprisingly followed through for his son, left me contrarily shocked.

And the Fifth looked at the crying blond-haired woman.

『Lyle. Just as this girl said, the marriages of nobles are the links between houses. Even if there's no love in it, children are born, and houses are succeeded. That is normal. Within that, it isn't rare to find a couple where both sides take on a lover once a child is born. The Walt House was a newcomer to that field, so for better or worse, we were unaware. It's true mama… my mother was a bit of a dreamer. So perhaps she held a yearning for a warm household.』

While he called his mother mama, he never called the Fourth papa. I'm pretty sure his mother forced it on him.

"Does that mean the Walt House is abnormal?"

When I said that, the Fifth smiled.

『It isn't normal. That alone is for certain. Those precepts from the First were a joke at a bar, for goddess' sake.』

I also gave a wry smile.

"That's… right."

And his smile turned sorrowful.

『… And I did too. With one wife, I wanted a warm house. And yet, Fiennes had thrown that all away. I even told him only to prepare mistresses if his wife couldn't have children.』

It seems the Fifth was actually jealous of the Sixth. And the surrounding scenery turned grey, and disappeared. A new scene laid out.

Lyle(; ` □ω□´): "Fifth! Please teach me the trick to maintaining a harem! What do you do when they start forming factions!?"

Fifth Generation Head Σ(□Д□ ;): "Don't carelessly intervene! Think of them as bombs with the fuses lit! If you touch them wrong, they'll explode in your face! You listening? Treat every day as a bomb on the verge of explosion, and cope. Always pay mind to everything. Act oblivious, as you calmly deal with it. But… "

Fifth Generation Head (;□д□): "… It'll still explode anyways. So you're not trying to prevent the explosion. You're trying to explode them skillfully. Harems… think of them as bombs where it isn't strange if they explode at any moment. And keep in mind they will always blow up eventually. Without fail. For me, at least two times in public…"

Young Fredricks

In Bahnseim, true nobles was a term to denote baron and above.

Knight, and baronet were positions that existed below that. But they weren't despised or anything; considering territory scale and responsibility, it wasn't a mistake that true nobility started from the Baron House.

The population under their charge, and the size of the land to manage.

They had an obligation to protect it all, and from it, the vassal knight and baronet positions came to be.

But they hadn't spent long years to obtain that title. The surroundings held dissatisfaction towards the upstart Walt House

The Third was a Hero, and the Fourth got on well with the King… he thought. Those times were good ones. But then came the Fifth's era.

From that time, the country of Bahnseim started growing stormy. Because invasions from outside powers were on a decline. As goes without saying, they had recovered the national power they expended in the Third's time, and it was a time where their left-over complaints, and the problems within the country were coming to the surface.

In the Fifth's room of memories…

The scene projected there was something I couldn't believe.

It was an unfamiliar mansion, not the Walt House's. With verdure hair, the Fifth of his childhood… Fredricks had his best clothes stained with dirt, surrounded by boys and girls at an unpopular corner.

Fredricks was crying.

『I-I didn't do any…』

He was small-built from a young age, and he didn't have the removed atmosphere he had now. And seeing the he of the past, the Fifth covered his face with his right hand.

『… I thought you didn't have to see. But if Milleia isn't satisfied, then I'll never be able to intrust my Skill to you.』

The gathered girls and boys kicked him.

『Shut it, damn upstart!』
『Because of your house, ours is going through hell!』
『When you're just a low-class house, getting so stuck up because they call you a Hero!』

The giggling girls seemed to truly enjoy the sight of Fredricks being kicked.

Unable to endure it, I extended a hand to the leg coming at him, but without being able to touch it, I passed right through. It was a projection of a memory, and Fredricks was slammed against the wall.

The Fifth explained.

『It's because the throne had already been succeeded. The king who felt a debt to the Walt house… or rather, the one who feared the Third was already an old man of a generation gone by. The situation had changed. Could it be these kids felt something in their childish view of the world?』

"What was the Walt House's fault?"

『Hmm? Ah～, it was that. The Fourth's ability in domestic affairs really was high, it goes to show. He invited craftsmen to a place devoid of anything, and raised them to be great. According to mama, he was managing the territory through trial and error, and sticking his hands into a number of things, but… the results came out.』

The results came out. As they started coming out, the Walt House began standing out from the surroundings, it seemed.

While the tax was the same, if you helped out in projects, you could get an exemption, or reward, and that brought out peoples' motivation.

As a result, it made a situation where there was less tax in the Walt House than anywhere around.

『I understand their hatred, you know. If the tax is extremely lower somewhere, the people will flow there. Both who they run to and who they run from are troubled, right? So after a few of those talks we got things together to an extent. Though the Fourth tried recommending it to the others as well, it seems. But no one can get motivated if it means lowering their prospects. Even if there's a large success next door.』

Even if they knew it would succeed, there are many people out there who wouldn't want to change the way things have always been, said the Fifth. And it was there that the Walt House shouldered a large problem.

『… The Walt House that had always been thought of as low-class suddenly held the largest power. But if everyone worked together, it was possible suppress the House. We were standing on a dubious power balance words can't describe.』

The children on the bullying side had probably been raised watching their parent's fear and hatred towards the House.

『Thinking back now, they were probably scared. Of the Walt House that continued to grow.』

As the Fifth said that, the children began to leave. With teary eyes, Fredricks wiped his face with his sleeve, stood, and patted the dirt off of his clothing.

And his retainers were brought over by the mansion's servants.

"… The servants were in on it?"

Those servants' expression ranged from conflicted, to holding in laughter. Perhaps they were talked into conspiracy by the House's heir, but they'd probably kept his retainers busy.

『Fredricks-sama! What happened to you!』

『Ah, t-this is…』

Before he could say anything a servant of the mansion spoke.

『Did you fall over? That's terrible. We'll prepare a change of clothing for you at once.』

He said, and led him off.

Having seen that, I didn't know what to say. I didn't think the Fifth would have that sort of past.

The Fifth spoke.

『… Lyle, let's leave it here today. It's quite hard on me too.』

On his words, I nodded, and left for the Round table room. In the room, Milleia-san was raising and lowering her shoulders in deep breathes, with a hand to the floor.

Her form was watched by the Third, who was sitting in his own seat.

『Lyle, were you able to learn anything?』

He was yawning, and it didn't look as if he'd moved a step from there, I looked over Milleia-san and the Third as I spoke.

"Could it be you purposely pulled Milleia-san away."

The Third chuckled.

『Everyone has a past they don't want others to see. I thought the slight father-con Milleia-chan might voice a desire to tag along. She's also a brother-con to boot. What a troublesome great grandchild I have.』

Milleia-san stood, and looked at me.

『… Lyle, did you see the Fifth's past? Whether you learn something from it or not is all up to you.』

I shook my head to the side.

『Milleia-san, please don't throw out that sort of line, as if none of that ever happened.』

When I said that, the gunpoint was turned on me, so I fled to the world of reality.

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The morning we would depart from Cartaffs.

I looked at the strange atmosphere surrounding my comrades.

Shannon was the same as always. She sat at the end of the cool newly-reborn Porter's loading tray, flapping her legs as she took in the outside scenery.

But Clara was acting a little strange.

She was talking with Ludmilla-san, who came to see us off, but by her attitude it was as if their conversation was one of sworn friends.

Ludmills-san spoke.

"Here is the item in question. It's a good things that we had them in Cartaffs, but they're relatively rare. Please treat them with care."

What Clara nodded and accepted looked to be a sort of bullet.

"It's a huge help. Bullets are valuable."

Ludmilla-san handed those valuable bullets to her en masse.

"It's fine. That you're safe is vital to me. And it will also be necessary to protect Lyle."

Saying that, Ludmilla-san laughed.

It's true it would be a huge help if Clara had the means to fight. For monsters, or for bandits, attacks by handguns had an extent of effect.

But watching over the two of them, Aria alone made a conflicted expression. And there was a strange distance between them. No, it looked like she was taking distance from Shannon as well.

Monica near me looked at that sense of distance.

『Oh? It does seem to me that a new faction has made its move. Now go and crush each other. I, Monica am more than plenty for the chicken dickwad.』

Seeing her come out with factions, I scoffed.

"What factions? You make it sound so grandiose. Quite a bit happened last time, but I doubt it's gone to that level. Good grief… even so, I thought Aria would be the one to get along with Ludmilla-san."

As similar female fighters, I thought Aria and Ludmilla-san would surely have plenty to sympathize over. But after going off to the bath together, the one who made friends with her was Clara, it seems.

The strange pairing made me want to tilt my head, but accepting those sorts of things happened, I decided to depart.

From the Jewel, Milleia-san, who'd been silent form her sullenness opened her mouth.

『… A powerful foe has appeared. I never thought that child would go to that side.』

The Third's voice was a little lower than usual.

『If anyone lays a hand on my favorite Clara-chan, I will get angry.』

Listening to their conversation, I wanted to tilt my head once more, when the Seventh spoke.

『How unexpected. I thought Ludmilla and Aria would have much to talk about… likes repel, was it?』

Within all that, the Fifth alone addressed me.

『… Lyle, call out to Aria. You can just strike a conversation while on the move. And you need to hold a little more tension.』

We were heading for Bahnseim from here, so that's what I thought it was about, but it seems I was off.

『This is bad. A wife who knows of factions. She may be more troublesome than Novem.』

He seemed to be worrying about it in earnest.

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The journey on the reborn Porter was pleasant.

On most roads, it could move with little sway. As we were travelling in a lump of steel, bandits and monsters didn't know what it was, and were too wary to come out.

Watching from afar, they saw how our movement speed was even greater than it had ever been, and gave up on chasing us.

I sat on the loading tray's bench-like sofas I spoke to Aria beside me.

"It's become quite comfortable. Though it's a problem how the strange added features have made it a little narrower."

Aria shared the opinion.

"It doesn't shake as much as before, and it's become more comfortable, but it's narrow. It would've been nice if we had a larger one. Like the one at Damien's place…"

Aria was smiling. But when Damien's name came out, Monica- who was knitting- reacted. She stood, and spread out her arms.

"You mean to say you prefer that fake Porter with nothing but its size to it!? You make light of this mass of romance I even added transformation functions to, and the proof of me and the chicken's love— ow!"

I borrowed Aria's spear to lightly tap the hilt against her head. A teary-eyes Monica sat on the spot, with both hands pressed to the hit portion. Her twin-tails gracefully fell across the floor.

She was calculating, and purposely making herself look cute, Valkyrie Unit One had informed me recently, so it felt quite crafty to me.

"Monica, quiet down a bit. You'll wake up the girl drooling asleep right next to you."

Seeing Shannon happily asleep, Monica took out a cloth, and wiped off the drool.

"Please don't sully me and the Chicken Dickwad's Porter."

And after saying that, she sat down again, and resumed her knitting. It was almost time for winter. It seems she was doing various things to prepare for it.

Last winter, she had stuffed way too much love into a heavy sweater and muffler, and gloves. I was a little curious as to what she would come out with this year.

I let out a sigh, as I returned Aria's spear.

"Thinking back to the start, we've got quite a few more people. When I used to make Zelphy-san angry in Dalien as I tried to become an adventurer. Yet now, we've been driven out of the Guild."

Zelphy-san was the adventurer who advised us right when we had just become adventurers. In a town full of newbie adventurers, she was a veteran.

She used to be of a family in service to Aria's House, and something of a big sister to her, it seems.

"If she looked at the current me, what would Zelphy say… if it's appearance alone, I've become a splendid adventurer, have I?"

It's true Aria held the presence of a female adventurer. On top of the equipment she'd grown accustomed to, her fighting style would make men feel ashamed.

But even so, from my point of view, having seen her various failures in her novice days.

"You've grown wilder, but you haven't changed too much. Lively, with surprisingly maidenesque hobbies."

Aria spoke awkwardly.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm crude after all."

She said, but it didn't look like she was too mindful of it herself. She laughed a bit. But her expression immediately turned dark.

"Lyle, there's something I'd like to ask you."

"Yes?"

She looked up at the ceiling, and confirmed that Clara driving up top couldn't hear, before speaking in a smaller voice.

"As I thought. I'm, you know… as you can see, and I'll still help you but… I think I'll give up on becoming your wife."

What Aria put to mouth were words that she'd assist but not marry me. But it looks like some part of her was seeking for me to approve of it.

In any case… I wanted Aria to find happiness, and if that was her choice, then…

But there, the one to put out an opposing opinion came from the Jewel. Surprisingly enough, it was the Fifth.

『Lyle, no matter what you have to do, detain this child. I'll say it. She'll definitely be necessary for you.』

The Fifth was seriously telling me to stop Aria. In my confusion, Aria looked a little nervous as she awaited my answer.

I opened my mouth.

"… May I ask the reason?"

"I-it's you know! I'm, like, not as strong as the others, and I can't put out money like Vera, and I can't lend manpower like the others can. I'm not smart like Novem or Miranda… even in magic, while I can use it, I'm no good at it. I'm aware I'm nothing but a hindrance."

Hearing Aria's words, the Fifth let out a stronger tone than usual from the Jewel.

『Lyle, don't let Aria get away. This child holds something you'll definitely need in times to come. Something neither Novem nor Miranda holds. Difference from Vera or Ludmilla, she's an absolute necessity for you.』

I half-listened to the Fifth's opinion, as I thought over what to say to Aria. But in my heart, I thought it… If she remained by my side, would Aria ever truly be happy? … that question.

Could I really just follow his words, and pursue happiness for myself alone? I thought.

Aria's Profit

Night.

As everyone was sound asleep, I had Monica take up watch.

Everyone lay around Porter's loading tray, but I was called by the Fifth, so I faced him in the Jewel.

The Third, Seventh, and Milleia-san were watching over us from a little away. Or rather, they were making a game of it.

『Is it that? As expected, was the Fifth troubled by harem matters? No～ I'm glad I only had one wife.』

『Quite right. It's a trial we wouldn't understand. If I had to say, I reached marriage by passing through love. Well, Zenoire's status did technically exceed the post of House Head, so I do admit it was a marriage on favorable circumstance.』

『He got the harem together relatively well, though. What problems did he see from his point of view, I wonder? If it were me, I'd have left for my hometown the moment my husband prepared mistresses, mind you. Love marriage as it may be, my brother's wife sure did a good job enduring it out.』

I ignored the faces taking intrigued glances at the Fifth, listening to his explanation on Aria. The one who advocated her was the First, while the Second hated her. The other ancestors didn't have any particular opinions on regards to her.

But come so far, when Aria said she wouldn't marry me, the Fifth changed his hand.

『Listen well, Lyle! That Aria… Aria Lockwarde is an extremely important girl for you.』

"No, did you ever say anything remotely like that up to now? And if Aria wishes for that, I can't…"

The Fifth was in the Jewel. In the round table room, he manifested

his weapon, his galient blade, turned its blade sideways, and hit the metal part against my head.

Seeing that, Milleia-san was shocked.

『Oh my, father got mad at a child. Now that's a rare scene.』

I held the hit part with a hand. He hadn't hit me particularly hard, so I went right into hearing him out.

『Listen and learn, Lyle. Women will occasionally tell lies if it is for their benefit. They'll present their bodies for your money. There are times you won't be able to understand what they're thinking beneath their smile. How many times have I thought they should learn from the purity of animals… but let's put animals aside for now. Anyways, women spit lies easier than men.』

"Well, I'm sure there's some truth to it. I was an adventurer, and I've heard a bit, and that one came up quite often."

Women are skilled at lying. I was aware, but I couldn't understand why the Fifth was bringing that up with me. As I was unable to understand it, I heard the Third's loud whisper.

『Huh? That Lyle really doesn't get it.』

Milleia-san also looked fed up.

『My recommendations are Miranda and Shannon, and while I don't care about the rest, I'm really not sure what to think of that.』

The Seventh alone was as incomprehensive as me. He was tilting his head, and looking between the Third and Milleia-san.

The Fifth looked at me, looked down, and perhaps his head hurt, as he held a hand to his forehead, and thought a bit. And lifting his face, he spoke in regards to me.

『Lyle, Aria lied. For her profit. Do you understand what profit that may be?』

Hearing Aria's profit, I instantly thought it was for herself. Rather

than marrying me, I'm sure she would find more happiness with another man. It wasn't just Aria. It was a plausible statement for the others of the female camp as well. How much happiness could be found having the one they love not being their own?

But the fact the Fifth was asking it meant the answer was likely something else.

"So Aria's profit isn't her own?"

The Fifth looked at my face, and spoke.

『Aria's is pulling out for your sake. That child is terrible at lying. Her body moves before her head, and she says whatever comes to mind. Did a girl like that hate it when you kissed her?』

I shook my head, and the Fifth held his. 'He still doesn't get it,' he said, and I could hear some more whispers. It was Milleia-san.

『Lyle's that. He's dropped every woman he's aimed for, so he doesn't really understand the concept of being hated.』

Hearing that, the Fifth raised his face as if remembering something, and snapped his fingers.

『Right! You, how were you treated at the Walt mansion!? Remember their faces. Whenever you said something, how did people respond!?』

I recalled. When I had begun to be hated at the mansion, when I said something to those around, they would complain. But they gradually began to treat me as a nuisance. The worst was when they treated me as if I wasn't there at all.

"Their eyes were really cold. As if it would be better off someone like me weren't…"

『I'm sure. I can understand that feeling. If Aria hates something, she'll outright say she hates it. Yet that girl followed you all the way to Beim. She decided she'd fight Celes with you. Why do you think? Do you think it was all for her own future? Just how many people out there believe you'll actually get the continent in your

hands? Even now, it's a goal that will warrant bursts laughter if put to mouth. Now how about Aria when you told her before Beim? I'm sure she needed a considerable resolve. Perhaps she was even resolved for death.』

When I heard that, I lost sight of what her profit could be. And what her happiness was…

"… Fifth, I hold Aria dear. I want her to be happy. Having followed someone like me so far, whether she can find happiness or not… the others are the same!"

The Fifth hit his sword against my head again. This time, it hurt considerably. I held my head with both hands, my eyes growing teary.

『… Lyle, you needed the female camp's power to fight Celes. You decided you'd accept them, right? Now listen, I'll just say it right out. Will she be happy? That isn't it. You'll make her happy! It isn't just your wives; among the humans you'll kill from here on, there will be plenty without sin. You've thought over what would happen to Beim, right? For what sake do you kill? For what sake do you trample to move forward? It was never just to grasp your own happiness, was it.』

The Fifth tossed his galient blade into the air. Watching it disappear into grains of light, I listened to his words.

『I couldn't do it. So I've no qualifications to say it. And while I know that well, I'll say it anyways. The others won't have a problem if Aria slips out. No, as long as she continues lending you her power, they may even tell you to look out for her to an extent. But I definitely won't accept it. It was something important, so I wanted you to notice for yourself, but if you still don't get it, I'll tell you.』

Unlike the Fifth, as long as we still had Aria's cooperation, the other ancestors would definitely say it wouldn't matter if she became my wife or not afterwards. But they would give thanks for her cooperation. If that was what Aria wanted, if that was her choice, I wanted to respect it.

But the Fifth told me with confidence.

『Aria's profit is… you, Lyle. It's your happiness.』

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Morning.

Exiting Porter, I saw Aria swinging her spear around.

The cold morning air. The grass on the ground was moist, and as I walked, they wet my boots. I could hear the cries of insects around. The sun had yet to rise.

Everything looked a shade of blue.

Within that, Aria was sweating as she swung her spear. It seems she noticed I was there, but without turning her face, she spoke.

"What? You're distracting, so if you want to move your body around, could you go somewhere else?"

Her blunt, cold attitude felt a little different than usual. Was she really thinking of me when she decided to pull out? Could it be the Fifth's misunderstanding? Various thoughts floated through my head, as I extended my left hand to the side.

A magic circle manifested, and from it, a wooden treasure chest popped out. It was the Seventh's Skill… Box. What emerged from it as if bursting out, was one of my remaining sabre.

One of the mass produced ones. A few of them were still in the box.

I grasped the sabre's scabbard with my left hand, took the hilt in my right, and unsheathed it.

With the scabbard still in my left, I pointed the blade's tip towards Aria.

“… Let’s have the condition of the other day. Last time was my complete victory. The both of us have grown since then. Don’t you think we should test and see who’s stronger now?”

Aria’s body stopped; she stabbed her spear into the ground, and turned to me. Confused, yet resolved… a complex expression.

“What? No need for women who don’t swoon for you? Then you should’ve driven me out from the start.”

I didn’t know how to respond to her. I didn’t know, so I didn’t speak. There, the Fifth’s voice came from the Jewel.

『Lyle, don’t think your worries are yours alone. You… shouldn’t make the same mistakes as me.』

Letting out a light breath, I stepped in, and thrust the sabre towards her.

That she stopped it with the spear hilt likely meant the spear was a superior one of good quality, and robust shaft.

If it were one of the Katanas I had him make, it may have been different.

“You react fast.”

Aria’s eyes turned sharp. It seems her mind had changed gears. The normal Aria, and Aria in battle…

“Underestimate me too much and… you won’t come out unscathed!”

Her power rose in an instant, forcefully blowing me back. One of the Skills recorded in her red gem activated, it seems.

I lightly leapt back, and landed, only for my feet to slip on the damp grass. Aria before my eyes leaned forward a bit, before disappearing from my sight.

“Quick!? No, a second stage!”

Aria's own Skill. To allow her to move swiftly for in instant, it had more explosive power than the Fourth's Speed. But its active time was extremely short.

Having mastered its use, Aria instantly showed herself to my right.

"A feint…. Left!

Even using the Second and Sixth's Skills to ascertain her position, she was too fast that identifying her was a trial in itself.

With the scabbard in my left hand, I took the spear she lowered at me. My body enhanced with the First's… Full Over… wasn't able to endure the force, so I parried it.

But she had instantly moved again… she was behind me.

I promptly rolled to the side, the ground I was at before hollowed out, with grass flying through the air.

I heard the Fifth's voice.

『Don't hold back. Give her an honest answer. Things can't go as they've gone before.』

I took a deep breath, and took to using every Skill in my possession.

Aria noticed a change in my atmosphere, and approached. The grass she swiftly raced through with Quick parted as if to make a path.

I crossed over the sabre and scabbard to stop her attack. With her weapon hardened, her power amplified, and her speed boosted, enduring her blow was dreadful.

"So you used Quick… and Slash together. That was quite dangerous."

Aria's face was close. And she smiled a bit.

"You're the one who started this match, Lyle!"

She disappeared from my eyes.

To take in the surrounding terrain as a three dimensional map, I used the Fifth's Skill… Dimension… and the Sixth's… Real Spec… to gather even more information.

Even using the Second's… Select… I turned magic towards her. As a number of fire balls pursued, I muttered.

"Full Burst… leading into Full Drive!"

Using both the First's and Fourth's third stage Skills at the same time, I quickly approached her. What surprised me was that even in that situation, Aria seemed to have a firm grasp of me.

In the slowly moving scenery, Aria alone was moving a little faster than everything else. Her lips moved. What I read off of them was…

【Boost】

… She mouthed.

Right after, from Aria, a small, truly small grain of light appeared, and Aria had stepped into the Fourth's world. She had caught up to his Skill.

"There!"

Aria swung her spear, and unable to take it, my scabbard was destroyed. She was moving even faster than me, and her strength had exceeded mine.

"I think I've said it before. Vanguard Skills are unfair."

A Vanguard Skill's characteristic was its offense-specialized explosive power. Even for body enhancement, they were more aggressive than the First's Skill. Due to the burden on the body, they couldn't be used for long periods of time, but even so their instantaneous force was different.

As Aria slashed a shockwave at me, I raced across the ground to avoid it. Gouged earth. Because of the mud dancing through the

airs, the two of us were muddy and soaked all over.

Seeing her seriousness, I spoke.

“You’ve grown strong. You’re really strong, Aria!”

When I lowered a sabre at her, her vulcanized spear broke the mass-produced blade. Watching the fragments slowly scatter about, I extended a hand towards her.

Grabbed around the collar of her clothes, and leapt close into a range she couldn’t swing her spear.

And keeping my legs running forward, I pinned her down.

The surrounding flow of time returned to normal, and I felt the blow of the wind. The cold wind felt comfortable on my sweaty body.

“It’s my win.”

“… Right. I lost again. So why did you…”

… Why did I do something like that? Before she could finish, I spoke.

“It’s my answer for yesterday. You lost, so you have to obey me. Stay by my side. I need you.”

Aria looked as if she was going to cry as she looked at my face. No, she really was crying, but she hid her face with a hand.

“… I’m not as amazing as everyone. I’m weaker than you, and I don’t have any money! I can’t offer any manpower! I’m not needed anymore! There are plenty of girls prettier than me! I… don’t want to become your burden.”

I got the feeling I heard a voice from her heart. It was true; Aria had lied.

“Even so… stay by my side.”

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… Watching over Lyle and Aria, the Fifth pat his chest in relief.

『Good grief, I'm not saying he should understand everything about her from being together so long, but… he really is a handful.』

Looking at the Fifth's relief as he sat on the table, Milleia spoke.

『You could've at least done that much when it came to us, couldn't you?』

The Fifth looked down, and spoke sorrowfully.

『… Like hell I could. I'm the worst sort of man, you know. I put my family, and the territory on the scales. I increased my family for the territory, and brought misfortune to my children. I knew it. It was wrong. But even so… it's all I could choose. So I'm…』

There were plenty of problems in the Fifth's time. That was because the surroundings were wary of the Walt House. To Baron Status in four generations. It was impossible by normal means.

What's more, the Fourth succeeded in his rule. He made it succeed. So those around felt fear.

The hero Sleigh Walt was a man of valor who attacked an army of ten thousand with some dozen men, and a righteous general.

There was no guarantee that blood wouldn't revive. They feared the Walts. Milleia spoke a little sadly.

『You could have talked with us more… Even simple conversation… would have been enough. Even I had times when I wanted a word from you.』

Milleia's demon eyes allowed her to see through the mental state of another party. She could determine it by the flow of their mana.

She knew the expressionless Fifth, always uninterested towards his children was always in sorrow.

His dependence on animals was because his psyche wouldn't hold up otherwise.

Milleia spoke to the Fifth. Correcting her posture, and showing off a graceful curtsey.

『Please teach Lyle everything. I'm begging you, father. That child is in need of your teachings. The memories you thought unnecessary are needed in the Walt House. Isn't it fine? Being bullied or taken the fool. That the Walt House could creep up from there, and rise to Count status was without a doubt because of your achievements.』

The Fifth continued looking down, without giving an answer…

Jules Parswall

… On the move in Porter.

Aria was in a bit of a good mood.

As she brought a drink to Clara, the driver, Clara looked at her as she accepted the canteen, and spoke.

“You’re in high spirits today.”

“Ah… yep.”

Clara felt Aria taking a bit of distance from her. She presumed it was unconscious, but perhaps she couldn’t forgive that Clara had taken up Ludmilla’s proposal, and joined the faction.

Clara put her mouth to the canteen, and noticed at once it was tea brewed by Monica. The scent, and the easy-to-gulp-down temperature and flavor, Monica was able to prepare tea with a level of perfection unthinkable from a machine.

But her hospitality to anything besides Lyle was lacking, and as long as you didn’t specifically specify what tea you wanted, she would only ever ready Lyle’s preferences.

Travelling down a path with no road, Porter could proceed down any terrain with its large wheels. On a little of a sway, Aria grasped a nearby handrail.

Clara was sitting in a seat Monica prepared, wearing what she called a seat belt, so there wasn’t a problem. It was fine as long as she had her staff in hand. But a spot of hot tea spilled from the canister, and fell onto her lips.

As she wiped her mouth, Aria posed a question.

“Could I ask something?”

Clara responded as she operated Porter.

“If it’s about Ludmilla’s faction, that is a conclusion I came to after thinking it out. It’s not like she’s trying to pull you in no matter what. And it would be better if you didn’t join a faction, Aria-san. Or perhaps you could raise up a faction of your own.”

“P-perish the thought!”

Being told to start her own faction, Aria opposed. But Clara response to the exact reaction she expected from Aria was a little bit strange.

“Why are you smiling?”

“I’m sorry. But you’re misunderstanding something, Aria-san. If you’ve got three friends together, that’s already a faction. And I have a complete lack of trust in Novem-san. Miranda-san will be taking Shannon-chan into her faction. Then that leaves Gracia-san, Elza-san, and Vera-san… to a greater or lesser extent, all of them are backed by House or country.”

Aria didn’t seem to understand what Clara was getting at.

“It’s true that my family is…”

“I’m pretty much the same. But even if you lent a hand to one of the others, considering character and sponsorship, the options are limited. Gracia-san and Elza-san won’t serve under another. They have their own countries’ interests in mind. Miranda-san is weak as a sponsor. She’s in a state close to isolation. So I chose Ludmilla-san.”

Aria looked like she couldn’t accept that. Clara saw her as an honest person, and felt a little jealous. They two of them were almost polar opposites.

“Something not to your liking?”

“… To be perfectly honest, I don’t think you have to serve under a woman who’s trying to make a faction. Doing something like that at an important time, it just kinda feels wrong to me.”

Clara capped the canteen, and looked a bit up.

“It’s precisely because it’s an important time. To oppose Novem-san and Miranda-san, I think I need Ludmilla-san. And at the same time, I can keep watch of her from up close.”

“You, couldn’t be…”

Clara pushed up her glasses, let them catch the light, and smiled a bit.

“The one with the greatest power right now, is Ludmilla-san. Not as an individual, she can support Lyle-san with aid on a national level. I thought it best someone keep watch over her.”

Aria looked at Clara, and covered her face with her right hand.

“You’re surprisingly wicked.”

Clara chuckled.

“Oh, I’m sure. Perhaps this is all I’m able to do. But… no, it’s nothing.”

What Clara was going to say at the end…

(But I can’t think Novem-san hasn’t taken Ludmilla-san’s movements into account. And this deployment… I get the feeling Miranda-san sent Shannon-chan over to keep watch. When you think of it like that, the faction war has already begun…)

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『Hmm～, so you got through it without losing Aria-chan. Good for you. If you lost her, it’s certain your future would be bleak.』

“D-dude… if you plan on talking to me, then get off of my back.”

Within the Jewel. In my room of memories, as if to pin down the fallen me, LYLE was sitting on my back.

He had a child's body, but it felt as if I was being pressed down by a massive boulder.

『How gallant. It looked like poor Lyle was in trouble, so she compared herself with the others, and found she had nothing, so she wanted to lessen the burden… well, after leaving the mansion, she's the longest relation you have next to Novem. She really is necessary.』

I put power into my body to try and stand, but LYLE looked on my efforts with a grin. And he continued on.

『You both need each other, really. That's how it is. Even so, if you've decided something once, it's no good if you don't push it through to the end. After kissing her so many times, not stopping a woman who's trying to pull out is just terrible.』

"G-goddammeht!"

I somehow got power into my arms, and raised my body just a bit. There, LYLE flapped his legs, and shifted his body.

My power application shifted, and I fell onto the ground again.

"Fugah!"

『Hah, when we're almost back home in Bahnseim, are you sure you're okay like that? Hey, do your best. You can't train your body in the Jewel. Try to do something with your Mana.』

"Mana… come to think of it, you called Mana poison a little while back, didn't you?"

I got my breath in order, as I wrung out my knowledge to find a way to stand up. If he said to do something with Mana, the easiest way would be to make an explosion nearby, and use the blast to remove him.

And when I thought it, I remembered his words. In the past, he had said Mana was poison.

『So you remembered. Well, it's not poison for now. Or rather,

poison and medicine's the same shtick. Long as you know how to use it, it can become medicine, is how it is. Of course, it was first thought of as medicine, so when it was mistakenly used as one, it caused quite a stir.』

I gathered magic on my palm, and tried to hit it against the ground to use the explosion to rise. But a sabre stuck through my hand as if to nail it to the dirt.

『Yep, no good. Self-destruction acts can't be put to practice at a moment's notice. Now think over it again.』

"Y-you damn brat!"

Within the Jewel, I continued my days of not being able to defeat the child me.

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Entering Bahnseim from Cartaffs, we put Porter away in the Box Skill, draped over robes, and travelled acting as an adventurer party of five.

Entering a town close to the border, we found a number of mercenaries and soldiers gathered.

We were about the only ones who knew Cartaffs wouldn't take any action due to Ludmilla-san's orders, so the town was filled with a tingling tension.

Shannon walking beside me grabbed my robe with her right hand, and looked around.

Scary faced mercenaries and adventurers. On top of the soldiers, it was an imposing town. Shannon was frightened.

"W-why does it look so dangerous. There were folks carrying around weapons in Beim, but it never felt this bad."

The reason for Shannon's fear lay in the fights breaking out wherever you looked. And with the sun high in the sky, there were drinks being served, and numerous harlots again, an ill-natured town.

"I'm sure it's rough because it's so close to the border. And those here have experienced war a number of times, so they can't help but look rough."

It was an occupation where you never knew when you'd die. For now, they were just desperate to live. And as we traveled like that with the five of us, a reaction came up on the Skills.

A group aware of us changed their signals from yellow to red, and tried to approach. From the feet visible beneath the robes, they likely discerned we were mostly women, and tried to call out.

I spoke to everyone.

"A group diagonally behind. Six in total. They're on our tail. I'd like to avoid trouble, so let's hurry on, and enter an inn."

When we swiftly left the aria, the other party sped up to catch us.

With the Fourth's Skill… Up 'n Down… I lowered their speed, and disappeared into an inn, successfully shaking off the six pursuers.

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… Djanpear.

Arriving in the southern country, Novem's party used the merchants as intermediaries to arrange a meeting with the king at his palace.

Maybe because it was south, the country's windows were large, and the palace's construction comfortably let wind pass through it. Many of the foods and plants were ones they had never seen before, and May looked like she wanted to drop by the castle town as soon

as possible.

Eva had set up a talk with her brethren of the southern land, and she seemed excited as well. Of all else, instruments unknown to her ears, and a unique brand of music. Because of that, she wanted to hear their tales ASAP.

Sitting in a large chair, with two officers stationed to his sides, the King【Jules Parswall】was a man of pink hair, and brown skin.

They had heard he was in his early thirties, but he looked younger than that. His facial features were firm and well carved into his face; coherent with the rumors he had played around in his youth, he was quite a looker. His blue eyes looked as if they were evaluating Novem and party.

His arms and ears were adorned with golden ornaments, and he gave off an atmosphere similar to the late nation of Selva, but his were not as showy.

“Welcome to Djanpear, shall I say?”

On Jules’ words, Novem and the others lowered their heads.

“It is an honor to be in your presence, your majesty. We are here in regards to the matter we’ve exchanged word on beforehand. Could we hear out your response?”

Jules touched a hand to his mouth, as he leaned his back into his throne. He crossed his legs, his pose indicating him to be deep in thought.

“It was only recently that word of the four-country-alliance reached us. What’s more, if even the northern land of Cartaffs is cooperating, you truly do hold an air of validity. However. My frank opinion: it is troubling if you ask for a response all of a sudden. My apologies, but I’ll be having you take up a stay in the palace a while. I don’t plan on inconveniencing you. For I don’t want to make an enemy of Cartaffs or the alliance, after all.”

Jules laughed as he said it, but Djanpear held a navy. It was powerful, and well reputed for exterminating pirates.

Novem could see that he didn't have any particular intent to bring harm to them. They truly were troublesome existences. He likely didn't want to cause a problem.

But at the same time, there was a distance between Djanpear and the alliance. And Cartaffs as well. Even if a problem did arise, it wouldn't be so easy for them to invade, and Jules surely understood that.

"Yes. Understood. Then we will be in your care for the time being."

Novem said that as a representative of the rest, so Jules answered with a smile.

"I'll try to come out with an answer as quick as I can. And I'm happy to have so many beautiful guests. I think we'll have a banquet tonight. Take part in it at your leisure."

The girls smiled, and took up his offer…

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… In Djanpear's palace conference room, the authority's sat atop a rug.

Jules sat on a space a little higher than the rest, the documents on the alliance and Cartaffs in front of him as he crossed his arms.

"Now then, what shall we make of it, gentlemen? An alliance of countries large and small. Both sides are larger in scale than us. But picking a fight with Bahnseim is close to gambling."

The authorities each spread out their opinions.

"Why not hand them over to Bahnseim, and gradually build a friendly relation?"
"You'll pick a fight with so many countries? The current Bahnseim has no credibility. We cannot trust them!"

“They’ve been especially strange as of late. It’s best not to poke them. Is it not best to offer them a polite refusal?”
“From their words, they are heading into Bahnseimian territory after this. They are searching for feudal lords who will be their allies. Just courteously send them off?”

With those opinions on the floor, Jules put them together.

“So to summarize your opinions, handing over the envoys is out of the question. Give them a polite refusal, and have them on their way… it’s true that is the safest measure. But can we overlook Bahnseim’s recent movements? I think them a threat, how about you?”

The authorities closed their mouths, and thought. From their border with Bahnseim, news of the country did come in.

For them to maintain a distance with one another, they weren’t negligent in information gathering. Because they never knew when the large nation of Bahnseim would rush into their own soil.

And for that sake, they had accurate information on Celes. Their opinions coincided. The current Bahnseim was abnormal.

But even if their opinions overlapped, their countermeasures did not. Many thought they could continue taking distance as they had, and the majority vote was not to assertively stick their heads into the flame.

But come so far, the countries around Bahnseim were showing movements.

“I thought it would take more time. With the threat of Bahnseim growing by the day, when there was nothing left for them to do… that was the moment I thought the surrounding nations would act. And for that moment, I augmented our military… yet someone made the first move.”

It was Lyle. Jules knew if he passed precise information of Bahnseim’s abnormality to the surrounding lands, they would show some sort of movement. So he pushed for a reinforcement of the

military.

And yet there was a man moving those countries himself. Mildly vexed that he was overtaken, Jules found it a little intriguing.

“I thought the time would come for Djanpear’s name to be known across the continent, but quite an interesting man popped up. Now then, gentlemen… we were planning to become the center, and make our move, but shall we let this chance slip by? Please keep that in your field of vision as you discuss.”

The authorities folded their arms, and one proposed.

“… Now is the only time we will be able to sell our services for a high price. There is no meaning in jumping in later. And in a state where we cannot lay hands on Bahnseim, if the surrounding countries lose without us lending a hand, all that awaits us is ruin.”

Jules massaged his chin, and spoke in regards to that.

“The four-country-alliance, and Cartaffs of the north are trying to make their move. If the countries to the west centered on Faunbeux move, then they’ll be able to hold around half Bahnseim’s might. How about we sell ourselves when that moment comes?”

One authority opened a heavy tone.

“If we measure that timing wrong, we’ll be destroyed. The risk is too high. Whichever the case, if we aren’t going to fight, then the only other option is surrender. Your majesty’s opinion?”

Jules stood, and boldly declared.

“Sorry, but I’ve no intent to share a woman with any other men. If we surrender, and I’m to be charmed by Celes, I’d rather be dead. So my ego has cut off the route of surrender. Carry on.”

The authorities sighed, and opened their mouths.

“Please put out a more proper reason. In the first place, even if we surrender, the probability we’ll be on the same terms with Bahnseim as before is quite low.”

“Is that girl called Celes really human? That’s the beautiful siren of fairytale herself right there. Bewitching humans, and that brutal nature.”
“The poor treatment of the country’s opposing faction… just listening in sends a shiver down my spine.”

And at the end, one of the authorities addressed Jules.

“I think our best bet is to assertively support them. But the representative man… we should send one of our own to that Lyle Walt.”

Jules looked amused.

“My daughters are too young. The eldest is ten.”

An authority spoke.

“That’s enough. But it will be troublesome if she can’t have a child in the near future. How about your majesty’s younger sister?”

Jules sat down, and shook his head.

“You think she’ll move for me? We’re not even of the same mother, and I’m the one who killed her full-brothers to get where I am, you know?”

One of the authorities put a hand on his face.

“Anyhow, so it’s been decided we will cooperate. We’ll figure something out with the concubine. If all goes well, it may be possible to take legal wife. But your majesty… please don’t lay a hand on the envoys. It seems they’re that man Lyle’s women or something.”

Jules smiled a little. Perhaps the authority felt a bad premonition, as his expression stiffened. And seeing that, Jules smiled even wider.

“Trust me. Even I’ll draw back if the woman is too dangerous. And. My instincts are screaming at me. Don’t even think about it. Gathering nothing but women like that around him, I’ve grown

interested in this Lyle fellow. I'd like to have a drink with him."

As Jules laughed aloud, the authorities lowered their shoulders in relief…

The Bahnseim Kingdom

The Kingdom of Bahnseim.

Stationed at the center of the continent, it held the greatest landmass within it.

The Sentras Kingdom… Bahnseim's origin point was the capital of the kingdom that once unified the continent, and by continually waging war on the parts of the empire that fell apart, it built up its current prosperity.

From the merits of defeating Agrissa of Sentras, the Bahnseim House took power as a new monarchy, their lineage carrying on to this day.

And our party having returned to that Kingdom of Bahnseim, we had decided to avoid the capital of Centralle.

It was inconvenient, but we would be avoiding Centralle as we headed west, and aimed for the Kingdom of Faunbeux.

That's how it was, but the country of Bahnseim was vast.

Unlike the places where the roads were looked after, there were places where you'd have to tilt your head at whether they could really be called roads at all. Proceeding down painstaking roads like that we stopped by one of our waypoints, a village.

Disembarking from Porter, we stopped by the village's head's house to exchange the materials of the monsters we had defeated along the way.

It seems a governor had been dispatched, but perhaps he thought we were adventurers, as after handing over money, he permitted our stay for only a night.

Evening.

As the village children watched Porter from afar, I stretched.

“It’s more comfortable than travelling in a horse drawn carriage, but just sitting the whole way is a bit painful.”

At the head’s house, we were allowed to park Porter in a portion of the yard, and Monica was carrying out maintenance. She was checking every part, and the requested Clara to do tasks like moving the wheels.

The daughter of the house came out to the yard, and informed us a room had been readied. The brown-haired girl that gave off a simple air looked a little surprised as she looked at Porter.

“A carriage of steel that needs no horse. So it really did exist. I had been convinced the peddler was lying.”

In Arumsaas, through the use of golem magic, the baggage carrier Porter was spreading.

Because of that, there were a considerable number of people who knew of Porter in Bahnseim.

In regards to the girl, Aria gave a kind smile.

“It’s our special model. They’re probably producing loads of them in Arumsaas.”

Hearing the name of Arumsaas.

“Ah, he did say that! In Arumsaas, there are lots of human-shaped dolls moving around, and people driving horseless carts of steel, he said. Mister peddler had only heard the rumors himself, but it looks like they were true.”

Arumsaas was a city of scholars. In the past, we had stopped by to gather comrades, and there, we had met Miranda, Shannon, Clara and Damien.

Aria spoke a little happily.

“I wonder if Lyra-san’s alright… oh, that’s right. Have you heard any other strange rumors? We’ve only just returned to Bahnseim.”

There, the girl thought a bit.

“In Centralle, the crown prince got married. But there are plenty of strange rumors about that, and to be honest, I’ve no idea which story is true. I mean, Celes-sama who he married… it seems she’s gathered many men to wait on her. But there’s no way the future queen would be allowed to do such a thing, and the marriage was supposed to be to Faunbeux’s princess, so I really haven’t the slightest what’s going on.”

A Celes-esque action.

The rumors were so absurd, then perhaps those around thought there was no way they were true. I handed a few large coppers over to the girl.

“Anything else?”

Taking them, she counted them, and tried her best to recall. Truly a testament to the grand power of money.

“… Ah! There’s Beim! We’ve officially declared war on them! It seems they won’t be recruiting from this village, but even so, the governor said we should at least prepare for it.”

When Aria heard that, she nodded lightly.

“So are they dealing with it just in the east? I’m sure it would be hard to send people from the opposite side of the country for it.”

Bahnseim had Centralle at its center, separated from there into north, south, east and west. Each district could deal with its own wars. When we requested the aid of various feudal lords from the south, that would be the southern district. When invading in the east, they would put out troops from the divisions on the east side.

I tried asking her.

“Do you know how many will march?”

“I don’t know that much, but Beim is a strong enemy, so they’ll surely put out some hundred thousands, the adults were saying. The

relations with Faunbeux in the west have grown worse, so I think that's why we were told to prepare."

Hearing that, I gave her my thanks.

"I see, thank you. We were planning to earn some change through the war, but… with those numbers, we'll have no space on the stage. Let's give up."

When I sent a look to Aria, she shrugged her shoulders, and nodded.

"Right. If there are so many in it, there's no profit left. It's best to go at it steadily."

We smoothly lied, and smiled off the situation.

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… Adele's unit dropped by a feudal lord she was acquainted with.

A Baronet House not too large in scale, but it was a house they were familiar with, so they couldn't help but want to stop by.

When they stopped by, the Baronet courteously welcomed Adele and Maksim. Holding only a town, and some villages around it, the Baronet could put out two hundred troops at most.

That definitely wasn't big, but as he could be trusted, he was the first House Adele stopped by in Bahnseim.

The Feudal Lord's mansion. In the parlor, Adele inquired.

"How is Bahnseim's present state?"

The Lord shook his head.

"It feels it's getting worse by the day. Our food stock has dwindled greatly by the war, and there are many places the fields have been ravaged, as if they're just rampaging about as they please. If you

oppose, Centralle's standing army and the Walt House will move. It's a nightmare."

The Walt House.

In Bahnseim, that name was the name of the strongest. Saving the country from crisis time and again, and growing larger with every generation.

"… The Walt's eldest son in Beim. Have rumors of Lyle Walt's movements reached this land?"

He nodded.

"The matter of Fort Redant has reached. But whether the information beyond that is truth or lie… a four-nation alliance, and something of ensnaring the Queen of Cartaffs? They really are siblings."

Maksim holding himself behind Adele's face cramped up. It's true the information wasn't wrong, but he felt some malice had been put into it.

Adele felt her head ache at the rumor, as she offered a correction.

"Seen from the outside, I'm sure that's the case. But the truth is different. I've actually met with Lyle-san. He built up power in Beim, aiming to take Celes down. There's…… no way he would ensnare women as the rumors go. Concerning the result, it did come to that, or how should I put it, he wants to do something by himself, or rather… A-anyways, he isn't as dangerous as Celes."

The Lord looked not at Adele, but at Maksim, who was looking at Adele with some slightly worried eyes.

Maksim spoke.

"It's alright. Milady has not been ensnared, I assure you. If he had made use of such vile means, then I would have personally defeated Lyle."

Maksim was a famed knight. The Lord trusted his words, and

continued on.

“Understood. I’ll believe it. So from your eyes, what are his prospects of victory?”

The other party was a feudal lord. And Baronet Class scale was the hardest feudal lord to handle, as Adele was aware.

Their scale was more abundant than a knight house. But they didn’t have the size of a Baron. Still, they had a level of ability, and it was an exceedingly troublesome position to do anything to.

The source of so many doing well in the world was that dubious standing. So Adele said this.

“Just barely. He may just barely win, is the current situation. He has already gained the cooperation of the four-nation-alliance and Cartaffs. In Beim, he received the backing of the Trēs House, and merchants of their faction.”

The Lord nodded.

“The Trēs House of Beim, is it? Quite the famous names. There are many Lords of the east who know of their House. I see, so they are backing him.”

Adele thought in her head.

(… I didn’t lie.)

Right, she didn’t lie. In Beim, the Trēs House was divided into two, and the one driven out was the one supporting him.

Based on how you put it, it sounded like a famed merchant house of Beim was behind him, so it was as if saying the city of Beim was on his side. If he was more knowledgeable on the inner dealings of Beim, then his response should have been different.

“Baronet, please lend your power. Lyle-san… Lyle-dono has mind to reward the lords who will assist him for their services.”

The other party crossed his arms upon hearing that. Continue to

play blind to Celes' violence, or risk cooperating with Lyle.

He opened his mouth.

"… Guarantee the safety of my territory. And I'll have you prepare a reward."

Adele thought it a bit strange.

"Baronet, you shall assist me in persuading other lords from here. Will the fee be so great? Don't you think it a chance to expand your territory?"

The Lord shook his head.

"Adele-dono, you understand not the sentiment of a Feudal Lord. It's true that expanding territory is important. But there are many who don't think to do it. If your scale increases, so too does your responsibility. A majority of those watching and waiting do so because they are satisfied with the current situation. Therefore they do not move."

Adele thought, I see, and nodded.

"And if you're handed a change of territory, it becomes a pain. For me, it would be better I just take a monetary reward. Ah, I'd like proof my house is assisting Lyle-dono as well."

Within that, Maksim to the lord.

"May I ask something?"

"What is it?"

"Please state the reason you believed in us. It will influence how we go about things here on."

The talks were going so smoothly, Maksim was mindful of that. No matter how good acquaintances they may be, it felt as if he was trusting their take way too much.

The Lord spoke.

"… If we leave Celes as she is, we won't get anything decent out of it. But my power isn't enough to do anything. If it was an envoy of Cartaffs, or the four-nation-alliance, then I wouldn't have lent a hand. Not to Beim either. But, the truth is, there are various rumors spreading within Bahnseim."

Adele recalled something, and pressed the Lord.

"About Dalien and Arumsaas? Or perhaps the slaying of the Gryphon at Centralle?"

The Feudal Lord spoke.

"All of it. Within the country of Bahnseim, when rumor of Lyle-dono flowed in from Beim, we put up our expectations just a bit."

When Adele learned her opponent had an extent of information from the beginning, she felt she had been played around with.

But the Lord spoke.

"Leave persuading this area's Feudal Lords to me. What I seek is the peace of my territory, and a reward. I'm sure there will be some requesting different things among them, so what shall I do with that field?"

Adele corrected her seating, and answered the Lord.

"I have been granted an extent of authority. I shall deal with it. And if it is Lords above Baronet Status, do you know where might assist us?"

The Lord crossed his arms. Looking down silently, after a while, he stared at the ceiling.

"Will it be difficult?"

He spoke.

"A little while back, all Feudal Lords above Baronet Status were ordered to present a hostage to Centralle. Not only heirs, but wives and fiancées… anything they could lay their hands on. I've heard

talks of even lovers being carted off, and in the current panic, I cannot say any specific where."

Adele thought Celes' actions had grown quite troublesome…

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Departing from the village, we drove Porter towards our next waypoint.

There was a place we wanted to reach within the day, and to hurry on, I operated Porter on rotation with Clara.

Monica, Clara, and Aria were lying down in rest, while Shannon was sitting on my lap.

"… You're heavy."

When I said that, Milleia-san in the Jewel.

『Lyle, aren't you too cold to Shannon? Treat her kindly.』

Hearing that, I looked at Shannon on my lap again.

"You're heavy."

I said. Shannon turned, and stuck her tongue out.

"They've taken up all the seats, so you'll just have to put up with it."

She said. Down in the loading tray, not only Clara and Aria, even Monica was lying down, so the space was quite narrow.

Milleia-san sounded lonely.

『Oh Lyle… where has the meek Lyle gone…』

The Seventh laughed.

『Isn't that your fault? And besides, I'm sure you're heavy too.』

I heard a gunshot, and silence. It was really, just the same as usual, so I ignored it. Shannon was facing forward on my lap.

A scenery expanded before her, but what she was looking at was a book Monica had prepared. It had letters written in, a picture book geared at children.

"Can you see it?"

Shannon sounded delighted.

"I can. But there's only this one and two more, so it's gotten boring. I did learn a bit from Clara, thought."

The specially-made picture book was colored, and extremely easy to understand. Having Shannon learn lettering was an extremely important thing to us.

Porter rolled over a bit of a large rock, and as its body swayed, I held Shannon's body in place.

"Drive properly!"

Seeing her pouting in anger, I pulled her cheeks, and made her teary.

"It's quite difficult. There's no way I could do it like Clara."

She didn't stand out among my comrades as support, but she was truly proficient in that support. Operating Porter, and assistance by magic.

Her knowledge was abundant, and she was reliable in various fields. There, Shannon returned her eyes to the picture book, and spoke.

"Why don't you tell her that? You'll forget it before you know it. That's called not feeding a fish you've already reeled in."

"Where did you learn that phrase? Well, I'll tell her in the near

future. More importantly, why did you come on this side? I was sure you'd go with Miranda."

There, Shannon closed her book, and turned to me.

"I'm here so make sure you don't stick your hands into strange games overseas. Rejoice, your cute Shannon has an eye on… ow! That hurts!"

Grinding a fist against her, and seeing Shannon tell me to stop, I smiled. There, with her teary eyes, Shannon looked at me.

"… You should really smile more. These days, almost all your smiles have been forced ones."

And she opened the book again, and restarted her studies. Hearing of forced smiles, I tried to respond, but I got the feeling there really were a lot of them these days. Perhaps she was paying mind to me.

"Right. Maybe you're right."

I looked at the unending scenery, as I held Shannon to make sure she didn't fall from my lap.

Revenge

Perhaps it had been revenge.

That's what the Walt House's Fifth Generation Head said to me.

The scenery projected around was a horrid one.

A fallen carriage.

Within a heavy downpour cold enough to bring pain to the skin on contact, a single woman covered Fredricks. Blood flowed from the woman, and she seemed worried about her slightly-swelled stomach.

I knew what this flow led to.

『Mama, mama!』

In the carriage that'd fallen from a cliff, Fredricks clung to the Fourth's wife… his mother.

『I-It's alright. Fredricks… it going to be alright.』

The ones who attacked the carriage were those dressed as bandits. But from what I could see from his memory, they carried it out skillfully. Hindering the guards, and attacking only the carriage, causing it to fall. I couldn't think it the offense of a robber.

Watching the scene alongside me, the Fifth opened his mouth.

『Back then, mama was laden with a child. She lost it protecting me. After that, she'd give all sorts of reasons as to why she wouldn't have another, she'd go on and on… but even I could tell it was because of the accident. I knew.』

The guards that raced over quickly kept watch as they destroyed the carriage, made a roof of it, and started a fire. They carried out emergency measures, and a single knight was dispatched on horse through the downpour to the Walt House at once.

The images went grey there and stopped. It looked as if the raindrops were frozen in air.

『… They weren't just bandits. We were merciless to our bandits, so I thought we may've bought their resentment. But even looking back on, they were too skilled. And the neighboring lord's son who invited us out in the first place called out to me with a smile afterwards.』

Was the Fifth thinking too deeply, or was it all devised.

The images changed, and this time, Fredricks was listening in from a doorway. Inside the room, the knights were speaking with the Fourth.

Making a fist, the Fourth was short of breath.

『Max-sama…』

I thought I had seen that worried knight before. He had grown weathered, but it was the knight punched off by the Third, who informed the Fourth of his crisis.

『… I know. Both my wife and Fredricks are safe. Asking for any more would truly be… but like hell I'll forgive it! Conduct a complete search! Flush them out! Use whatever means possible to get information out of whatever bandits you catch! I'll also use this to…』

Gripping the blue gem hung at his neck, the Fourth likely planned on using the Third's Skill Mind recorded in it. But that wouldn't' constitute evidence.

『Information forced out by a Skill is often written off as something implanted by the Skill itself. Even if we identified a culprit, we wouldn't have been able to lay a hand on them. It's laughable. If we weren't such a large house, we'd easily have been rendered immobile.』

When I listened in on his words, the scene changed again.

In his early teens, Fredricks was once more in a mansion not the

Walt's. Surrounded by children his age, punched and kicked.

『Shorty, just when is your place going to start listening to us!?』

A large-built boy hit the Fifth. Colliding with the wall, Fredricks didn't say a word, as he tried to stand. He was kicked.

Around, some noble girls of the same ages were laughing as they watched.

『Upstarts are just the worst. I definitely won't want to marry into the Walt House.』
『And he's a shorty, after all.』
『His mother's also a shorty, and an imperial noble at that. What's more, she can't have children anymore. Worst as a woman as well.』

Fredricks looked down, as he grit his teeth, and bore it. The large boy grasped up Fredricks' lapels, and lifted him up.

『Try saying something back, shorty. Well, since it's all true, guess you can't. That day, the carriage fell, and she was injured right?』

Fredricks endured. He clenched his fist hard enough for blood to drip from it, but he endured.

"Fifth, why didn't you say anything back?"

The Fifth looked at the image.

『… Because they all had their stories straight. They'd clearly discussed it beforehand. If I did anything back, they'd make me the bad guy. Naturally, that would become a problem in the talks between our parents. I said it, didn't I? The Walt House of the time was in a dubious standing. We couldn't even trust our own vassals. Oh, there were some houses on our side, though. The Forxuz House, for instance.』

The scene changed to the Walt House manor.

His mother spoke to Fredricks.

『Fredricks, you aren't hiding anything?』

『N-not at all.』

Max carried on.

『… The truth is, a neighboring lord brought up talks of marriage between you and his daughter. I declined it. The Forxuz House's head and previous head were strongly against it as well. She wasn't worthy, it seems.』

『… Okay.』

Max seemed to notice something. But Fredricks didn't say much in regards to the matter.

He merely turned a smile to his parents.

And the scene switched to a village where cultivation had begun.

Fredricks was surrounded by knights, looking over the village, and studying.

『Is this a good land?』

One of the knights courteously explained to him.

『I can't say it's very good, but if the work is put it, it can become plentiful. If it succeeds, it will become your achievement, Fredricks-sama.』

『But I'm just watching the work as a part of my studies?』

The Fifth looked at the young knight, and muttered.

『… Old Randbergh. That's his grandson.』

Hearing Randbergh, I looked at the young man. Thinking I'd definitely seen him somewhere before, I saw he resembled the one I'd started to admire as a knight.

The Fifth continued.

『Served as a knight from the Third's time. He was a good guy.』

And a small girl crashed into Fredricks. It seems she had ran around a corner, and collided.

『H-hey! Separate from Fredricks-sama at once!』

The knight extended a hand to the girl, but Fredricks laughed, and shook his head.

『It's fine. You'd better be careful from here on.』

The girl looked at Fredricks with a face that showed she didn't really get what was going on. There, a young girl who was probably her sister raced over with a pale face. She lowered her head, and gave an apology.

『I-I deeply apologize!』

Bowing a number of times, she held her presumed sister close, and pleaded for her forgiveness. Fredricks looked quite confused at seeing her like that. So looking at the elder sister, Fredrick's face was a little flushed.

『I-it's fine! We'll overlook it this time. Now return to your work.』

His voice was a little raised, and the two young girls looked relieved, as they lowered their heads with smiled. Watching their backs as they ran off, Fredricks hesitated.

And seeing that, the knight.

『… Shall I send them around to your room tonight?』

There, Fredricks' face went bright red.

『Y… y-y-y-you fool! I-I didn't… didn't…』

Those around looked at him, and smiled. He walked off with a large stride, shook off the knights, and proceeded on.

The Fifth looked at the scene.

『We planned to increase our number of cultivated villages from there on. So the Fourth determined there was a need for me to learn the site. Because the area rugged as can be.』

The Fifth reminisced. But his eyes looked on sorrowfully.

And after that, a few more scenes of Fredricks conversing with the sisters flowed passed. Little by little, they were getting along with one another.

It was then.

Fredricks was called back to the Walt House manor for a temporary return.

At the entrance to the village, The Randbergh House heir and the villagers saw him off.

Fredricks got on his horse, and spoke to the two girls he'd gotten along with.

『I'll be back soon. Um… at that time…』

Those around looked upon his reddened face with smiles. The elder sister nodded.

『We'll be waiting for you, Fredricks-sama.』

Fredricks smiled.

But…

The next scene projected was the remnants of a village burnt down. Stock still, Fredricks was led along by his guard knights through the burnt site towards the tree in its center.

A few survivors remained, raining jeers on the box.

『Why couldn't you have come sooner!?』

『My… my daughter…』

A couple I'd seen before. It was the couple that had appeared in the

runaway Sixth's memory.

Walking slowly, Fredricks set his feet towards the tree in the village center.

There were villagers hung up on it.

The young man of the Randbergh house was stripped of his belongings, and put up in a terrible state. It looked like he'd resisted to the end.

And in a position standing out at the very front, the sisters that Fredricks befriended were hung.

Methodically… calling it that would be strange, but they were definitely put up in a way to make a mark on Fredricks. Falling at the knees, he looked at the letters carved into the trunk.

Shorty… they spelled out.

Fredricks looked down, and I could see the look in his eyes change. Sharp, and muddied, those eyes made me swallow my breath.

The Fifth turned.

『… There was no proof. But there were limited humans who knew the internal affairs of the village. I wanted to take troops at once, and raid them. I wanted to do the same to them. No, I wanted to go eradicate them.』

Without changing his expression, the Fifth went on indifferently.

『Someone had to have leaked the information I was close to those sisters. I had a general idea. Someone tied to our vassals. They'd gone off with a smile, and sold our information.』

I looked up at the tree of the village, and turned away my eyes. Could man really do something so terrible, and was there a need to go so far…

"This is too terrible. This is…"

『Don't call it impossible. Listen here, Lyle. The ones who did this were the same as us. The same Feudal Lords, the same Nobles. One step off the path, and we'd do such things to. As a matter of fact, I'm sure even worse things were done to the territories that tried to invade Fiennes. If someone invades your land, it's necessary to give retribution. Because if you let them make light of you, then they'll keep repeating something like this.』

I understood you couldn't let yourself be made lightly of.

And the Fifth spoke.

『… About the feudal lord who'd invaded us this time, once upon a time, they got along well with the Third, you know. But with a single generation built up, this is what it came to.』

There were lords, and there were citizens… the one to decide the territory's policies was the lord, and while if he were proficient, he'd bring glory to the territory, if he were incompetent, he could ruin the land.

There were many instances where a change of hands made for incompetence, and the reverse was also true.

『… You see, Lyle. I swore it there. I would definitely have my vengeance. No matter how many years, how many decades it took, I would eradicate them.』

I looked at the Fifth hanging his head. But in the Fifth's period, the Walt House continued enduring, and in the end, they didn't invade any surrounding territories.

"What happened to change your plan?"

On my words, the Fifth looked up at the sky, and laughed. He laughed, and in the end, in a small voice.

『My own child. The first time I looked at Fiennes, I was truly lost. When I truly hated them. When I truly wanted them all dead… I didn't want them, my own children to have to go through the same. It was too late. I already had the mistresses, and the plan all together, and yet… by the time I noticed it, I couldn't stop it

anymore. ♩

The Fifth said that, and quietly drove me out of his room of memories.

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Inside of Porter.

Under the light of the lantern, what Monica informed me of was the hostages being taken throughout Bahnseim.

From any large-scale House above Baron Status, Centralle had given orders through the country for hostages to be presented.

Putting together the information obtained from Adele-san, it meant that by that mandate, there were many Feudal Lords who couldn't move even if they wanted to.

On that information passed through the Valkyries, I thought to myself. But what crossed through my head was the Fifth.

In Porter's loading tray, Clara spoke to me.

"Lyle-san, are you alright? I think it best you get some rest."

After lightly rubbing the corners of my eyes with a fingertip, I shook my head to the side.

"My bad, please continue"

Monica looked over me as she conveyed the information.

"For those without hostages, it seems those Baronet and below will move for the peace of their territories. If we take them into our forces, we will be able to prepare troops from within Bahnseim."

There, the Third spoke up.

『That's wrong. It's true there are feudal lords who want peaceful reign. But there's no guarantee they're all like that. There will be some who want more land, and others who'll think to use the opportunity to settle disputes with their surroundings. As expected, we'll need the assistance of Lords above Baronet, who have vassals under them. It's best to keep troubles to a minimum. Or rather, if you've nothing but small-time lords, there's no way to get them together. It will be hard to lead them in a large-scale army, I'm sure.』

According to the Third, it would be difficult to get all the small-scale lords' opinions to align. A lord capable of that sort of fine tuning… we need to get some lords on of Baron or higher.

And as commanders, they wouldn't be able to take charge of such large forces.

"Monica, tell Adele-san's unit. It's important to start small, but we need to get one larger lord on our side. Lest it be impossible to get them together ourselves."

Monica had prepared tea for me. Herb tea, it seems.

"She believes it difficult. Taking hostages is one thing, but the problem is those hostages. Do you think they'll be safe when put under Celes? Even if you promise their rescue, in the end, there is a possibility, they have changed to her side from the depths of their hearts. The possibility they are already no longer of this world it…"

It will be difficult to take back the relations of the lords taken off. If it came to those negotiations, we were in a situation where we couldn't say we'd definitely save them.

Clara spoke to me.

"As expected, is there no choice but to start from the bottom? Even if we defeat Celes, if the hostages aren't safe, the root of their problem will remain."

Aria was negative.

"If it was possible to infiltrate Centralle, and rescue them, It

wouldn't be strange if someone had assassinated Celes by now."

Having faced Celes, and experienced her irrationality, Aria's opinion was on the mark.

But we didn't have time.

"What about the western front. What's become of the lords near Faunbeux's border? We're currently headed their way. If they're still safe, there are still ways to go about it."

Lifting her face, Monica shook her head.

"She does not have that information. As Adele-san is in the east."

Novem's party was south. If their task finished safely, they would enter Bahnseim from there.

Thinking a bit, I came to a conclusion.

"Gather information. If it's not too late, rescue, or recovery is thinkable. If they're already in Centralle, that's impossible. If not, then we can do what is possible with our numbers."

I sent a look around, and everyone nodded.

Margrave

… The Margrave of Resno.

The feudal lord left to the border with Faunbeux, and a single feudal lord who had grown quite busy alongside the worsening relations with Faunbeux.

The lord had the border left to him, but it's not as if he was protecting it alone. He had the cooperation of surrounding lords in defending the border, but at present, he was isolated.

Centralle had sent a demand for hostages.

The current head, 【Varius Resno】 had his long, gray hair tied to the back. He didn't usually tie it, but reading the letter from the surrounding lords, and from his son sent to Centralle, 【Balfelt Resno】, he was making a sour face as if he wanted to chew that letter to bits.

"That girly of the Walt House. She deceived my son."

With status high as Margrave, it wouldn't be strange to hold an estate in Centrale. He had sent a representative to manage it, and naturally enough, Varius sent his heir Balfelt.

Then the Walt House's Celes got engaged to the crown prince, and the gears began turning strange. No, they had been strange before that.

Balfelt had stated it wasn't a good plan to have Varius leave the territory, and gone to the mansion in Centralle of his own will.

And when the hostage matter came up, he volunteered as one gleefully.

Up to that point, a part of Varius had thought there was no helping it. But from Balfelt, he received word he wanted to offer up his wife and son… to Varius, that would mean sending off his grandson.

The surrounding lords also voiced their desire for him to send them

over.

“Is the Resno House charged with Faunbeux’s border really that untrustworthy!?”

As he crushed the letter in his hands, the Knight behind him in service to the house opened his mouth.

“Varius-sama, at this rate, we’ll be surrounded by Faunbeux and the other lords. I do think it painful, but you have to take some measures.”

Varius was aware of the abnormalities of Centralle. But most Barons and Viscouts without the level of power as Margrave had sent hostages to Centralle as a means of securing their safety.

Centralle’s army was one thing, but it was mainly an act in fear of the Walt House’s army.

With Centralle going strange, the Feudal Lords didn’t keep still. They marched to Centralle to remonstrate them, and many lords had ended up charmed.

At present, Varius had a number of choices.

“… If I send my daughter-in-law and grandson to Centralle, they’ll only become that little girl’s toys. But if I change sides to Faunbeux…”

The knight carried on his words.

“Then this land will become the battlefield of Bahnseim and Faunbeux. The safest option available is to send the hostages, and adopt in an heir from a relative. With that, you can match the pace of the lords around you, and stand against Faunbeux.”

Varius lowered his fist onto his table. The letter it clenched was crumpled, and torn by the impact.

“A relative? Oh, as if there’s a decent one of the lot! Each and every one of them is after the position of Margrave. And besides them, there are only the ones who come asking to borrow money. If they

were decent, I wouldn't be so troubled! I've no intent to concede my status to any besides my grandson!"

The knight's eyes narrowed.

"… I understand you dote on your grandson. But now is not the time to say such a thing. It won't be a direct line, but at least the blood of the Resno shall remain."

Varius was soft on his grandson, and had decided he would only ever hand his status over to him. But looking around, it was also true there were no kin worthy of being Margrave. The knight seemed to believe as long as you trained them a few years, they'd be at least useful enough to succeed.

"… Let me think about it. They've already taken my precious son away. This matter is to be put on hold."

Varius sunk deeply into his seat, and covered his face with both hands…

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"Hmm, so besides the eldest son, all the Margrave's children married into other houses?"

On route to Faunbeux, the five of us dropped by the marketplace of a passing town to gather information. Those of the surrounding towns and villages made the trek to sell goods at the market, and as we purchased food, we spoke with a talkative aunty.

When I refused the change for the meal, her tongue began sliding quite jovially.

The well-built aunty left the store to a man (perhaps her husband?) and told us various things.

"Our lord over here has some business relations with him. See, the

Margrave's place is the border, right? A little while back, they sent away the princess, so he had his work cut out for him, but his sons were also proficient. They were on favorable terms before things got hectic, so he had sent his sons off to be married."

According to her, when they were on favorable terms with Faunbeux, his second and third son were sent in as grooms.

But when the situation changed, his heir, his son had entered Centralle, it seems.

"Our lord over here sent his wife and kid off at once, though. Not much to say about that. Well, he surrounded himself with lovers soon after, so I guess that's all they were to him, but the Margrave declined sending any additional hostages, I heard. Because of that, there's a tense air going on in the country. Quite troublesome."

After having his son taken hostage, he was requested to offer that son's wife and child…

"That must've been hell. So among this area's feudal lords, have all the others besides the Margrave sent their hostages?"

The Aunty looked up a bit.

"Let's see. Yeah, a few months back. No reason not to. That Margrave really ought to consider other's feelings a bit. If he gets Centralle's eyes on him, then even the Walt House will make its way here. Before Centralle runs out of patience and sends a force to meet them, they should just send themselves to Centralle."

The Walt House… no longer a famed name of Bahnseim, it was a symbol of fear. From the Jewel, I heard Milleia-san's voice.

『Well, to the people, the feelings of lords aren't quite relevant. Personally, I think the form of one hesitating to send hostages regardless the cost is quite favorable, you know.』

The Third laughed.

『What's favorable for me is how we're Bahnseim's enemy, and he's in a convenient position. But if he were a little smaller in scale, and

it was a territory where the people had more chances to meet the lord, perhaps they would be more sympathetic of him.』

The Fifth spoke listlessly.

『Only if he was a good lord to the people, right? Even if they sympathize, they'll still tell him to send them in the end. Because everyone values themselves.』

The Seventh listened to the Fifth's opinion.

『How cold. But I won't deny it. Now then, let's leave our personal impressions at that… Lyle, looks like you've something to do before entering Faunbeux.』

I gripped the Jewel, and after signaling my affirmation, I smiled, and gave the aunty my thanks. While I was at it, I handed over more change.

"Thank you, I've heard quite an interesting tale. Here's thanks."

There, the aunty spoke.

"Shop with us again. I'll throw in a discount."

As we stood and left, she saw us off with a smile.

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Entering an inn of the town, we washed off the fatigue of our travels.

Gathering in my room, Monica prepared herb tea and snacks for everyone, and got the preparations together.

As Shannon reached a hand to the sweets, Monica.

"If you eat that, you'll have to brush your teeth again."

Shannon puffed her cheeks.

“But I just did it after I got out of the bath, so isn’t it fine!”

Monica scoffed.

“Of course it isn’t. If you’re fine with getting a cavity, and having your beloved sister lecture you, then go right ahead.”

Clara took a treat in hand.

“Is it really an issue? Just brush again.”

Aria on the other hand.

“I do it before I go to bed, so there’s no problem for me. Ah, this is good.”

Monica lifted a twin tail up with one hand, as she put her opposite hand on her hip.

“I, Monica, personally prepared those sweets. There’s no way they’d be bad. Matching the Chicken Dickwad’s tastes, they’re the ultimate…”

The explanation was getting long, so I took one in my hand, and brought it to my mouth. A crisp texture, and a cream and jam with some acidity to it. Bite-sized, and tasty. Perfect affinity with herbal tea.

But…

“I preferred the one from last time.”

When I said that, she immediately left the room, so I hurriedly called to stop her.

“oy, what about the meeting?”

“Don’t stop me! Preparing the sweets you desire is my duty! If you say the sweet you ate before was better, then this Monica need only borrow the inn’s kitchen and cook it up!”

Reaching a hand for her third sweet, Shannon lay on the sofa stomach-first, and kicked her legs.

“Didn’t you bring cooking tools along? Why not just do it here?”

Clara refuted Shannon’s words.

“I’d rather you not. The smell will just make me needlessly hungrier.”

There were various problems that came with cooking in the same room, and with a grasp on all that, Monica was trying to head for the kitchen.

Aria chewed on a sweet in her mouth as she spoke.

“More importantly, let’s get to the talks already. This time we’re requesting the Margrave’s assistance, right? Will we negotiate so he doesn’t have to hand over the hostages?”

Aria was right. If we wanted to get him on our side, it was true we had to do something about the hostages. But we didn’t know what was on his mind yet.

When I called Monica back to my side, she delightedly approached. Standing behind and to the side of the sofa behind me, with a solid, imposing expression.

“I do think we must get into contact. But one wrong step, and we’ll be restrained and bound for Centralle. So it all starts with rumors. And from there, we start our move.”

Clara looked at me with an expression that seemed to ask, ‘Again?’

“Lyle-san, you plan on fooling our negotiation partners again?”

Within the Jewel, inaudible as he was, the Third tried to unravel the misunderstanding. He surely hated his favorite Clara sending such eyes of doubt my way.

『That’s wrong. That’s wrong, Clara-chan! We’ll only spread and publicize the truth of what happens to the hostages sent! Sent off to

that Celes, there's no way they're unharmed!』

Aria was the same. She looked at me.

"You always turn to those sorts of means."

The one wounded by those words was the Fifth.

『… N-no. This is just a fundamental, and manipulating information is a vital point. It isn't a bad means.』

These guys are hopeless, the moment their favorite girls chastise them, they grow weak at the knees. I'm sure the First would've said not to think of anything, just march in and negotiate, drafting up a plan much more to Aria's tastes. Then what of the Second? I'm sure he'd proceed with caution.

The Fourth would… and the Sixth…

Milleia-san spoke.

『This is why kids who don't appreciate it are no good. Just look at Shannon, she's not even trying to understand the situation, and she hasn't given the slightest objection to Lyle's plan.』

Is that really something to brag about? As I thought that, Shannon nodded.

"You're always so petty."

She said. Within the Jewel, the Seventh burst into laughter, but after several volleys of fire, it went quiet.

"I'm sorry, but I've no plans to change our course. Let's gather information, and think up his character, as we decide a detailed plan. If possible it would help if some are sent from Centralle to collect the hostages."

It sounded plenty possible Centralle would send a squadron for them. It would be most convenient if he was dealing with them when we came in.

Aria looked at me, put an elbow on the sofa's armrest, and put her face on her hand.

"What are you planning this time? Even if you win against the squad that comes for them, there's no meaning in that. On the contrary, they may start sending actual forces. Or could it be another dirty scheme of yours?"

Because I did this and that regularly, it seems she believed I favored dirty schemes. But that wasn't quite right. We would lose if we fought upfront, so we could only rely on such tricks.

It's not my fault. It's the fault of the all-too-great war potential difference between we and Bahnseim.

"No, this time isn't that dirty. It's actually quite honest."

Clara showed some interest.

"How rare. So what's this honest plan of yours?"

I spoke full of confidence.

"Yeah, the truth is I think I'm going to go off and kidnap the Margrave's son's wife and child. And then comes the negotiations!"

Besides the sleepy Shannon. Aria, and Clara were staring at me. Monica said something like, 'you're too vile, damn chicken. But I'll still follow you. For that is my aesthetic!' from behind me.

"… Eh? I-I mean! Wouldn't that make it much easier to negotiate with the Margrave!? As things are, we won't even be able to properly meet him, and it's dubious whether or not they'll listen to what we have to… h-huh? What's with everyone?"

The Third reacted to their reactions.

『Huh? I thought it was quite nice?』

The Fifth agreed.

『Not bad for something Lyle came up with?』

The revived Seventh.

『Did he phrase it wrong? We're saving the blood relatives being carted off from those dogs of Centralle! See, doesn't that have a nice ring to it?』

Milleia-san giggled.

『Even if it sounds decent, he'd be doing the same. But Lyle sure has grown. Kidn… rescuing the Margrave's grandson, and using the… favor to negotiate.』

I stood and explained, but those two pairs of eyes only grew colder.

"What's so bad about it!?"

Shannon looked at me.

"It's so wrong, they don't know exactly what part of it to scold you about. Or rather, you're definitely threatening him, aren't you? How should I put it… cowardly?"

Being called a coward, the words that came up in my head were, 'Coward is a compliment where I come from!'

… It seems I've been dyed in the ancestor's colors in various bad ways. Mainly the Third, and the Fifth, and the Seventh… ah, quite a thick lot, and what's more, only the relatively scheming ones are left.

Varius

… Varius sat hunched in the seat of his office in the castle.

By the rumors spreading through town, the hostages headed to Centralle weren't unharmed. Such info had flowed even to the populace, and knowing by his own intel network, he knew nothing good would come of it. So Varius felt cornered.

Within the room, his retainer knight stood.

"Varius-sama, We are unable to deny anymore of Centralle's demands. If you continue putting in on hold, the capital will send the imperial guards. If it comes to that…"

On the knight's words, Varius lowered his fist onto the table. A little while later, he opened his mouth.

"I know. But thinking of my grandson and daughter-in-law, sending the two of them to Centralle is akin to sending them off to hell. My son is in Celes' cage. Anymore is…"

The knight understood his sentiment. So he put to mouth the second and third son, who'd married to other houses.

"Shall we call back the boys you sent off for marriage?"

Varius shook his head.

"As if I could do that. If I did it, I'd have to go through due process, and take in their second or third son as heir. If I act too strongly after marrying them off, it'll become hell."

His sons had been married into houses of lower status, but even so, if he used his power to call them back, it would come out with problems. To add to that, his eldest son was alive. He even had a grandson. Officially, there wasn't a reason to call them back.

The knight spoke with a resolved expression.

"Will you protect them even if it means war?"

Varius couldn't make a decision. He loved his grandson. His son was already Celes' slave. At the very least, he wanted to protect his grandson.

However…

"For the sake of my grandson alone, I cannot sacrifice the territory. But, just a little longer… I beg of you."

Hearing Varius' conclusion, the knight nodded.

"Let us wait until the imperial guard arrives. With how tense our situation remains, we could not spare forces, tell them something like that."

On the knight's words, Varius powerlessly nodded…

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Within the Jewel.

Surrounding the round table, we heard out the Seventh's opinion.

『I know Varius-kun. I remember it. He was standing beside the previous Margrave of Resno. Never talked with him before, though.』

Investigating around Margave Varius and leaking rumors, we spent a few days. At that time, the Seventh recalled something, but it doesn't seem he knew the man himself.

The Third sounded bored.

『You know any embarrassing stories about his youth? You got the Margraave of Resno his territory back, didn't you?』

The Seventh shook his head.

『I did regain it, or rather, it was scattered landholdings, so the

Walt House wasn't able to manage them. I handed them back. However, I got the demarcation of the other disputed to proceed favorably.』

In the Seventh's Era, the Walt House's standing was that of counsel to the throne. It was proof at just how large the House's power had grown. But because of that, they had some trouble shoved onto them.

The Fifth sighed.

『You sure work hard when there's so little to be gained. If it were me, I wouldn't want to get involved.』

The Seventh seemed to be of the same opinion, but there was a bit going on for the Walt House of the time.

『Even I generally hated it. The one charged with it all was the Walt House. But it's true I wanted a new leaf at the time. I took over quite a few bad rumor from the Sixth, so the head's standing was a dubious one.』

Milleia-san touched a hand to her face, and tilted her head a bit.

『About the Margrave of Resno. The previous generation was quite incompetent… or even if that wasn't the case, he wasn't overly skilled, to say the least. His son's means, from what I can see of the territory, aren't bad.』

The city, and surrounding villages… from what I saw, he could be called a benevolent lord to the people. To protect the border with Faunbeux, it was clear he was putting his effort.

I put together the rumors I'd gathered today.

"By the rumors, he's soft on his grandson, and his grandson is proficient as well. Giving the reason that he was too busy preparing the border, he said he couldn't spare men to send the hostages, it seems. But he hasn't explicitly stated he won't send them."

The Fifth lightly tapped his finger on the table with a fixed tempo.

『… Meaning he does have plans to send them? Or will he oppose to the end… a Margrave alone won't pick a fight with Bahnseim. Even if he changes sides to Faunbeux, this area used to be an important land of Faunbeux to begin with. They'll just take it from him, and call it quits, or perhaps they'll use him and have him crushed in the war with Bahnseim.』

The Third looked interested. He folded his hands on his lap, and grinned.

『Nice. One son in Centralle. The other two married off, and he can't easily lay hands on them. He doesn't want to part with his precious grandson, is what I'm feeling.』

The Seventh, delightedly.

『I've gained a bit of a favorable impression of Varius-kun. Let's lay off a bit in negotiations.』

I hid my mouth with a hand, and thought of what was to come.

"We'll be expending a bit of time before Faunbeux. It's true they're on the border, so we'll be able to hear rumor of Faunbeux as well, but… should we wait until the imperial guard shows up? It's thinkable the Margrave could prepare his own guards to send them to Centralle"

The Third closed his eyes.

『If that's what it comes to, than pitiable as they may be, you'll have to injure a few. Take care not to kill them. He's your important negotiations partner. There's nothing to be lost in refraining from angering him.』

We were attacking them after all.

I made my resolve, and thought up a plan to give as few casualties as possible.

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… On another front.

Adele's unit took the Baronet along to break up the east.

This time's opponent was of Baronet Status as well, and he was making a conflicted expression.

In his estate, they were surrounded by his soldiers throughout negotiations.

Adele was troubled by his demands.

"A rise in rank just from cooperating? My apologies, but with the scale of your territory, it is my belief Baron would be impossible. Carrying that extent if responsibility isn't quite…"

On Adele's words, he pinched his prided beard with his fingertips to get it together.

"If I am to cooperate with your cause, I can put out three hundred soldiers. Is that insufficient? And if that's the problem, I need only receive a territory large enough to fulfill my obligations. Fret not, I'll do something of the Knight Class Houses around. If you'll prepare a level of reward for them."

Adele glared at the good Baronet sitting beside her. The Baronet made a not-my-problem face. But he couldn't remain silent.

"Aren't you biting too much with no achievement to back it? If you want a territory of Baron Scale, you'll need to hold at least twice your current land/"

The other party gave an undaunted laugh.

"Then I'll accept a territory change. Right… I'd like a territory close to Centralle. I've grown tired of these sticks of the far east."

Adele felt a bit like smacking him, but while this Baronet House was a pain, the Knight Houses around him were also a pain. With scale from settlement to village, there were various Knight Houses

in Bahnseim.

They all had different demands, and there were many unsatisfied with just the peace of their territories. As Lyle had said, without someone larger to get them in order, it would be difficult, she had begun to believe.

Adele looked at her opponent.

“If we give preferential treatment to one, the others will seek out the same level of returns. I cannot approve of it.”

He made a leisurely expression.

“Then I’ll leak your info to Centralle. That Lyle Walt’s party is secretly moving around.”

Adele glared at him, but perhaps he only saw her as a little girl, as his expression didn’t crumble.

However, the Baronet beside Adele lowered his voice.

“Then would that mean making a foe of me, and the others who’ve already promised our cooperation? That sounds rough. I’ll have to return and draft up countermeasures at once.”

Their foe’s expression turned somber. The same position of Baronet. Speaking to scale, there wasn’t much a difference in power. Making an enemy of the surrounding lords as well, however, was painful.

“… There is a land being disputed with the neighboring lord. That land has belonged to us from times immemorial. If you will cooperate in taking it back, I shall cooperate with your cause.”

Seeing him suddenly fold like that Adele realized he had still made quite a large request. She didn’t quite like these sorts of negotiations.

“And that that neighboring lord would be?”

“A Baron. Fret not, if you take our side, he is but an easy foe. And could you dispatch at least five hundred soldiers?”

On his request, Adele's head started to hurt.

(This is… just as Lyle-san said. If we don't take them down from the top, we won't be able to handle it.)

She had made light of small-scale lords, but here, she was facing a severe loss of time…

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… There was a squad dispatched from Centralle.

Led by Celes' imperial guard knights, three hundred soldiers of the capital's standing army.

The reason for their departure to the land of the Margrave of Resno was because he wouldn't send a hostage to Centralle no matter how much time passed.

The unit leaving the castle was spied by a certain Celes, moving down the corridor, riding on the back of a woman. She stood up straight on that woman's back, to watch the group set out.

"Huh~? Did I tell them to dispatch a unit anywhere?"

The woman seemed to be in pain, and she didn't show any adoration to Celes. That was precisely why she was receiving such terrible treatment in the first place.

Tattered clothing and a choker, she was being treated as if she was a dog. The reason was simple… she didn't bend to Celes.

To Celes, people like that were simply interesting toys. She simply adored the defiant, and played most delightfully with them.

Nearby, the captain of the imperial guard, 【Breid Vamper】 answered her smile.

“Celes-sama, that is a unit setting out for the Margrave of Resno, who won’t dispatch a hostage. A foolish frontier feudal lord, who won’t obey your will.”

Celes gave an intrigued smile, as she licked her lips.

“Aha, come to think of it, I did ask him to get hostages. Oh Rufus, so he actually carried it out so earnestly. It had totally slipped my mind.”

Wearing a tailcoat, and toting red hair, the butler… automaton spoke indifferently.

“But that woman you’re treating as a horse was sent as one of those very hostages. How many does that make it? You should really fix that habit of losing interest in no time and breaking them.”

The girl walking behind Celes… dragging her long, black hair as she walked, the surrounding people took care not to step on it.

Celes looked at 【Rumel】and smiled.

“It’s alright. Rumel properly cleans up. Right, Rumel?”

The girl called Rumel opened her small mouth. But that mouth gradually expanded, as she showed off sharp fangs and a large tongue to affirm Celes’ opinion.

“You’re adorable, Rumel. When you opposed me and I killed you, I thought you were nothing but a stupid quilin, but once revived, you’ve grown so honest and cute. But I’m sorry I couldn’t use the Skill well enough to give you much in the ways of speech.”

Rumel… the divine beast who had once met Celes and fought… the quilin girl was brought back from a husk to be Celes’ marionette.

Celes ground her foot into the fearful woman.

“If you’ve had enough, just say it. I’ll free you at once. Aha! You should see yourself shake. You’re an interesting one.”

Finding the woman’s quivers interesting enough, Celes lowered

herself onto her back. And she pulled at the thread attacked to the collar.

“Then we must be off. Let’s take a round of the castle today. We’re going exploring.”

The sweet sound of Celes’ laughter. The humans obeying her were all fascinated by her.

Only the automaton could watch her with such cold eyes…

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In a city held by the Margrave of Resno, we collected information as we spent our days.

I was taking an afternoon nap in my room.

No, I was sending my consciousness to the Jewel.

The location was my own room of memories.

The one I faced was LYLE, and in my hand, I held a Katana. Whether I cut, or used magic, LYLE dodged everything, as he hit his attacks into me.

『No good. Absolutely terrible! Your attacks are too honest. You’re putting in too much power.』

He cautioned me, as he cut my shoulder, and then the back of my hand. Making me drop the Katana, he leapt at me, and executed a kick.

I was hit off my feet, and as I rolled, Lyle circled ahead of me, and stopped my rotation with his foot.

『Yeah～, you may not be at a level where you can manage something against me on your own.』

Out of breath, I looked up at LYLE. There, he showed me his arm. Rolling up his sleeve, I saw a clear blue line running down it.

“What’s that?”

LYLE lightly continued. A part of it felt courteous.

『The flow of Mana, perhaps I should call it? In short, it’s pretty much a blood vessel. But what flows through it is Mana. The Walt House has polished Support Skills over the generations, so you should be seeing a blue line. And the ones who have these stretching all around their bodies are humans.』

There, LYLE took my arm in his hand. Reacting to his light, I was able to see a line on my arm as well. But its shape was different from LYLE’s.

To put it simply, it definitely connected somewhere, but it was ragged. From what I could see, it was in a horrible state.

LYLE looked at that.

『… That Celes, after stealing them, she ripped yours to shreds. No wonder your efficiency is so terrible.』

He put away his sabre, and traced the line on my arm with a finger. That line of light… but LYLE’s face turned grim.

『She’s destroyed it extremely carefully. She must have been considerably scared of me.』

I stood, and asked him.

“So what happens if that line is fixed?”

『It’ll improve the efficiency with which you can use the Mana in your body, but she’s perfectly torn them up, so even I can’t fully repair them. How should I put it, even if you output a ten, I can’t even guarantee you’ll get a two or three. Even if you’re successfully treated, you may reach a six or seven, perhaps?』

Hearing those words.

“Then if I get this fixed, I could fight against…”

『That’s not happening. I mean, you can’t even win against the current me, so there’s no way you can win against Celes, who pretty much has my power added on top of her own. Her side has Septem… Agrissa as an ally. If you’re alone, it won’t even be a contest.』

When I lowered my shoulders in disappointment, LYLE laughed.

『But I think you’re fine just like that. Not being able to fight without the aid of others, it means… you need others, is what I’m saying.』

I looked at LYLE.

“Are you calling me unreliable?”

『Perish the thought. There are some things it’s better to have lost, is all I thought. This is just a hypothetical. But if I tried to stop Celes, I’d surely be alone… or with a few. And perhaps I’d have been able to do something about it. But that wouldn’t be any good at all.』

When I tilted my head, LYLE looked at me, and smiled.

『Lyle, I think you’re a single different completed form than Celes.』

Mother

Leaving the city for the forest, we had Porter transform, and raise its upper body.

Covering it with a cloth, and putting netting over that, we used mud and branches to get its outward appearance in order. Its head was closer to its left side, so we tried attaching on another head for balance, and it truly became something sinister.

With the needlessly handy Monica directing its appearance, and Clara- who'd gotten even better than me at operating- in the driver seat, we had put together a monster in no time.

Seeing Porter raise both its arms, me, Aria and Shannon applauded. Shannon probably just read the mood and applauded, and to be more precise, she could only see that we had covered Porter with something.

Monica put away her tools in the gap between her skirt and apron, sticking out her chest.

"How about that! No matter how you look at it, it resembles those strange lifeforms you call monsters. No, it's more perfect than any of those lowly beasts!"

Aria stopped clapping.

"And so? We'll attack Centralle's forces using this road, and rescue the Margrave's family, right? Then what?"

Aria emphasized the word rescue. It's true that it sounded more decent than using words like kidnap, or abduct. Though we'd be doing the same thing.

I patted off the dirt that had stuck to my clothes during the work.

"My apologies, but we will be using them as negotiation pieces. We'll be sending them right off to Faunbeux."

Shannon tilted her head.

“What about negotiating with the Margrave?”

I looked up a Porter… monster version, before turning a smile to Shannon.

“Of course we’ll do that. But on favorable conditions, that is. We’ve a need to have some talks with Faunbeux as well, so I’ll be leaving them on hand for the time being.”

To obtain Faunbeux’s cooperation, we would need to prepare merit for the other side. And I could anticipate what they would ask for, to a certain extent.

I thought that plan would require more time to adjust, but I had gathered surrounding information, so I was able to finalize our policy.

Aria hesitated a little.

“Shouldn’t you return the hostages to the Margrave from the start to show your sincerity? From there, getting his cooperation isn’t…”

I shook my head.

“Sorry, but the Margrave will have to compromise. Otherwise Faunbeux won’t move. And the land the Walt House cut off from them… why don’t we return it?”

What Faunbeux desired… it should be their own soil torn away by the Walt House.

Within the Jewel. The Seventh spoke excitedly.

『Feudal Lords are lifeforms that can’t stand their territory being scraped away. There are times they’ll consent, and hand it over. And times they’ll divide it amongst relatives… but those that can laugh off what’s stolen are failures as lords. There is no value in taking such folk into our side.』

Milleia-san took over explanations.

『That’s precisely why the hostages. Negotiating with Faunbeux,

and the Margrave as well. I can't think he'll obediently stand down, but family affection will take its seat at the negotiations table. If all goes well, we'll be able to leave him to guide Faunbeux's invasion, so we really should get the Margrave's cooperation.』

Clara looked at me, as she pushed up her glasses.

"Um… Lyle-san? In that case, the Margrave won't assist us, will he? His land stolen, and his family held hostage, you'll leave much too bad an impression. There's far too little in it for him to begin with."

I laughed.

"It's alright. I'll prepare something he'd love to take a bite into."

The Third spoke in a tone full of implications.

『It's not like he said he'd only be taking land away. We'll properly prepare it. Properly.』

After the preparations were in order, I stretched.

"Now then, a squad coming for the hostages has been spotted, so how about we wait?"

A messenger had already raced ahead to inform the Margrave of the unit's approach. Time-wise, we'd be attacking a few days later.

"… Our number one priority is securing the hostages. Next comes defeating the enemy commander. Clara, I leave it to you."

Clara nodded.

"It's vital to whittle away the enemy war potential, after all."

There was no necessity to annihilate them. No, while we were doing that, it would be terrible if reinforcements from the Margrave came. If we could preferentially take out the commander, it would be a huge success.

And we hid ourselves until the attack was to come.

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A few days later.

Having received the hostages, the force from Centralle returned using a road going in and out of the forest.

They had spent a night at his castle, and immediately set on their way.

Before boarding Porter, I took Clara, and led her to a place separated from our other comrades.

“… It’s kinda, when I’m calmly using my Skill like this, I suddenly become embarrassed. It’s a lot easier when there’s some reason we have to rush.”

I grabbed Clara’s shoulders with my hands, and pressed her against a tree. When I looked down, and got my breath in order, Clara smiled.

“Come to think of it, you’ve gotten able to kiss easily whenever there’s some reason to it. From your point of view, are you just kissing us because there’s a need?”

If we were in a hurry, there was no problem, but if there was enough time, I couldn’t help but hesitate. No, it was necessary now, so we really should hurry, but we still had some time to spare.

“When we’re in a hurry, I don’t have the time to think, so… when I can stop and think over it, I start thinking of this and that…”

There, Clara approached me, grabbed my face with both hands, and kissed me. In my surprise, I had noticed she had removed her glasses, and closed her eyes.

After a while, she parted her mouth, and reapplied her glasses with both hands.

"… We've been linked. I can see the map, and the movements of the troops. Their responses are yellow, but… the ones we're to rescue are at the very center. I'll go get ready."

Recovering the staff she had leaned against a tree, Clara walked off. I touched my lips, and followed behind.

"Clara."

When she turned, her face was just a little red.

"What is it, Lyle-san?"

After thinking a bit, I shook my head, said it was 'nothing,' and walked towards Porter beside her.

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Inside Porter's loading tray.

After fastening our bodies down with belts on Monica's words, we commenced our attack on the dispatch from Centralle.

From their point of view, it was as if they were suddenly assaulted by a variant of monster they had never seen before.

Closing my eyes, I could see the scenes Clara saw.

Using Porter's arms, she flung aside a single panicked knight. Truly thrown, the knight flew off his horse, and after hitting the ground, he had stopped moving.

Shannon, in the swaying Porter.

"Wait! Seriously, wait! I'll throw up! I really will!"

Monica had her bite into a cloth.

"You'll bite your tongue like that. And it's alright if you throw up. It

feels like you're about to forget it, so I'll throw it out, but I, Monica, am a maid."

So what if you're a maid? I wanted to say, but in this swaying vehicle, it was best not to carelessly open your mouth.

Clara skillfully operated Porter, having it do a single rotation near the center of the group.

From the two arms extended outwards, the surrounding soldiers were blown away.

One of the mounted knights moved to use magic, so from within the loading tray, I touched the wall, and used magic.

"Magic Shield."

By the magic shield projected to block the knight's blow, Porter escaped unscathed. Perhaps he thought it was a monster with magic resistance, as he hurriedly yelled for the surrounding soldiers to take their weapons in hand.

But the soldiers of Centralle hesitated to confront a monster they'd never seen or heard of before. I had heard they were an army that didn't even fear death, but it seems perhaps not every soldiers was caught in such a state.

The spirit of the knights, however, was high.

When one held his weapons and tried to cut, Clara hit Porter's arm against him. It was something of a slap, but at that scale, it wasn't something that could be endured.

Shot into the air, and rolling into the air, left in a state bent in ways bodies shouldn't be bent, the knight stopped moving.

After she couldn't confirm any knights around, Clara instantly went to retrieve the carriage.

The soldiers that made a path whenever Porter moved. And a conspicuously extravagant carriage…

“… Clara, that’s not it. The ones riding aren’t a woman and child!”

When Clara grabbed the carriage and lifted it up, two knights fell out from within. They had taken off their armor, and drink and food had fallen out alongside them. When the two of them hit the ground, they looked around in a frenzy once they spotted us.

On their behinds, they looked up at Porter with eyes of fear.

“It’s the wagon! The wagon one behind! First, take…”

Take care of these two, and rescue the hostages. When I was about to issue those orders, the Third cut in.

『Lyle, leave those two be. That’s more convenient. Someone has to take responsibility for this mess. And let the horses run. It’ll buy some time.』

Believing in the Third’s judgement, I issued orders.

『Clara, release the horses! And once you retrieve the wagon, we’re retreating!』

Clara retrieved the wagon in both Porter’s hands, and went right into fleeing from the unit. It didn’t seem they were following, so we set Porter on a path right from Margrave Resno’s territory towards Faunbeux.

Of course, without using the roads.

“It’ll keep shaking for a while.”

Aria seemed relieved the shaking of battle had ended.

“But it won’t sway like it had before. More importantly…”

Aria turned her eyes to Shannon. With a pale face, biting into a rag, Shannon looked as if she would throw up at any moment. Monica handed a bag over to her.

“Please spit into that. It’s fine if it spills onto the floor, but if it spills onto my chicken, you won’t get off lightly. Well… I would love to

clean up a filthy chicken too.”

I looked at her.

“I think you should learn a bit more prudence.”

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… … The castle of the Margrave of Resno was flurried.

The unit of Centralle that returned seeking help.

Returning to the scene, it looked as if the carriage with the Resno House Crest on it had been slammed against the ground. It was in tatters.

The knights had immediately searched the area, but because the soldiers that went to get reinforcements hadn’t any horses, the message came late.

By the time the Margrave’s men were investigating, a considerable amount of time had gone by.

Before those in charge… the surviving two knights, Varius directed a glance filled with rage.

“Bastards… you ran back to me without protecting those you were charged to guard!? After acting so high and mighty, you let my precious family be stolen away by monsters!?”

Both knights boasted untrained bodies. One had let his expand enough it looked like his clothes would burst. The other was contrarily slender. Way too slender. The two untrained men had become knights on the status of their houses alone.

“T-that is!”

“Margrave! If you lay a hand on us, Centralle will…! C-Celes-sama

won't keep quiet!"

Hearing those words, Varius held down his right arm that was trying to pull his sword. He glared at the two knights with eyes full of malice.

"Two knights who failed their missions… I do hope Celes-sama finds it in her to give a damn!"

Letting off some sarcasm, Varius ordered his men to keep searching.

"Find them at all costs! 【Parselena】 and 【Blaeubeigh】… at whatever the cost, my grandson…"

Seeing Varius' impatience, then men hurriedly formed an additional search party…

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Faunbeux.

Having hurriedly left the Resno territory, we looked at the young boy resting on another's lap in the loading tray.

With brown hair and green eyes, the boy who took after his mother was sound asleep. The one lending her lap as a pillow was the mother 【Parselena】… a woman with straight, long hair, and green eyes as well. It seems she was still in her early twenties, but she could pass for less.

Ignoring roads and the like to enter Faunbeux, we forced Porter across a wide river to enter the country.

While on the move, we had somehow managed to persuade the two, but they were still wary. Parselena-san had exhausted bearings, but she couldn't bring herself to sleep before us.

I let out a sigh.

“If you don’t rest, it’ll be poison on your body. Even if that isn’t the case, isn’t that tension of yours wearing you out?”

Parselena-san gave thanks for my proposal.

“Thank you. But I do not trust your group. It is true you saved us from that unit of Centralle, but by that, you have brought trouble to the House of Resno. To be blunt, it was none of your business.”

Within the Jewel, Milleia-san laughed.

『Quite right, quite right. Nothing to say to that.』

I put a line I’d said a number of times to mouth.

“We mean you no harm. And I think Margrave Resno will be safe. Because the two of you aren’t anywhere near him.”

The Third spoke happily.

『I’m sure right around now, he’s writing a letter of complaint to Centralle. Centralle also faced some loss to their side, so I’m sure they won’t make any poor moves. Well, even if they did, that would make a gap to attack in itself.』

The Seventh was the same.

『If they oppose the Margrave, it will be all that much easier to take him in. Normally, both parties would have to compromise, but with this situation… and it also depends on what Celes decides.』

Parselena-san looked at me, gripping【Blaeubeigh】’s shoulders as if to protect him.

“Is that so… we aren’t going to be harmed, you say. Are you going to demand a ransom or so from the Resno House? I’d recommend you abstained. It is a Margrave House charged with the defense of the border. It isn’t as kind as you all seem to think.”

She gave off a calm air, but her expression was the epitome of severity. I’m sure she had much stress in these sudden changes of affairs. She was enduring quite well.

The Fifth, quietly.

『Mothers are strong, goes to show.』

Perhaps the picture overlapped with that of him and his own mother. I spoke to Monica.

“A blanket and a drink… prepare herb tea, and something easy to eat. I’ll tell Clara to drop her speed.”

After Monica nodded, and went into making it, Aria nursing a fallen Shannon asked me.

“You sure? Aren’t we pressed for time.”

I nodded, and spoke in a quiet voice.

“Better than collapsing. And it’s a bit hard on the eyes.”

Saying that, I headed for the front where Clara was stationed.

The Faunbeux Kingdom

… The Kingdom of Djanpear.

Having acquired a promise of cooperation, Novem's party discussed matters with Jules.

How much force could be sent out was one thing, but the main issue was how the soldiers of Djanpear would fare on level ground.

Numerous mountains made for mountainous warfare, and with their sea, the soldiers could fight adrift. On their unique terrain, they could amply exhibit their strengths. And precisely because of that, whenever Bahnseim tried to invade Djanpear, they'd always throw in several times the resident force, and face defeat.

Losing their war potential before they could cross the mountains, and even passed them, the climate and environment were so different, there were many soldiers who would fall ill.

But this time was the opposite, where soldiers would be sent out from Djanpear.

Novem and Miranda, and Jules with his guards nearby, enjoyed some tea as they spoke.

"My apologies. We had much to discuss, and ended up wasting your time. Speaking to results, we will be assisting you. But the manpower we can put out is fifty thousand at most. Any more will be harsh. There is too little time."

Supply, equipment, and training… they couldn't just gather people together. In usable numbers, Djanpear currently held fifty thousand.

Novem, in regards to that.

"That is greater than our estimate. Pardon my insolence, but I had anticipated thirty thousand from Djanpear."

In the warfare with Bahnseim to that point, Djanpear had been defending with around fifty to sixty thousand troops. So Novem had

thought they would only be able to prepare thirty to forty thousand on top of that. While there was little level ground to be found, it was a plentiful land.

In the past, Bahnseim had also longed for it, its ports built up, and prospering from trade. To the land-locked Bahnseim, it was a land they had to gain at all costs.

And the country that had continuously turned the tables on them was Djanpear. But lately, they hadn't been actively fighting one another. And Djanpear was a country that, while skilled on the defense, wouldn't assertively invade others. Rather than saying they were satisfied with their bounds, Novem thought it more that they weren't confident in their offensive prowess.

Jules didn't try to hide anything, as he sipped his tea.

"The sky's been looking rough over Bahnseim. So I prepared troops for the occasion, is how it is. Originally, I wanted to spend more time, and prepare a hundred thousand."

Miranda's eyes turned sharp.

"I can't think that's a number you can maintain, though?"

As she determined that based on the country's scale, Jules mumbled something like, 'good eyes,' and laughed.

"We want some flatland for ourselves. Bahnseim will fall to ruin under Celes, and the surrounding countries will start into a scramble for its remains… I expect that much. Of course, I never thought there would be movements so soon."

Novem listened to his words, and reaffirmed he planned on getting his forces ready for that moment to shave away Bahnseim's land.

"Truly, one hundred thousand is a large number. But with that alone, Djanpear's objective–"

"— Is an expansion of land. And to hold a voice once Bahnseim is subjugated. So I'll be placing my expectations in that area onto your leader. The price for our collaboration is land, and a say."

Miranda nodded.

“Certainly, we can consent to that. But do you have no worries towards battle on level ground?”

Jules nodded frankly.

“You’ve a point. If we were fighting on mountains, I don’t have a feeling we would lose. I’m confident we could keep company a foe three or even five times our size. To us, the mountains are the same as a fortress all around. But when it comes to flatland, it really is worrisome. For that, I’ve been increasing our forces and training them. We won’t be a hindrance.”

Able to freely traverse the mountains, the soldiers of Djanpear held strong legs. But there was no guarantee that all battle would be in places they favored.

And because of their special environment, they had few horses. No cavalry to speak of, their army was centered on foot soldiers. Though there wasn’t a doubt those foot soldiers were strong.

Novem put the information of their forces together, and addressed Jules.

“Understood. Then next is the chain of command. This alone I cannot step down on. You will recognize Lyle-sama… Lyle Walt as the supreme commander.”

Jules nodded, but he stuck up his index finger to put out one condition.

“I mind it not. After Cartaffs and the four nation alliance have recognized him as such, we cannot be the only ones to refuse. But can I put out just one condition?”

Miranda asked cautiously.

“And that would be?”

Jules spoke with a smile…

“I’d like to have a drink with that Lyle Walt. When I heard of him, he piqued my interest, you see. That much should be fine, right?”

After thinking over it a little, Novem took up Jules’ condition…

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… Novem and Miranda confirmed the baggage loaded onto May.

A letter containing the internal affairs of Djanpear. After dipping the pen in a vial of water-like liquid, and writing with it, the letters quickly dried, and became illegible.

Watching over the process, Novem folded the letter closed, and stuffed it into the bags.

Near quilin-form May, Eva tilted her head.

“Hey, is that really necessary? Wouldn’t it be faster to leave a verbal transmission to those girls?”

The liquid was something of mana-imbued water. Using it to write invisible symbols, Novem explained it to Eva.

“It’s all in the preparations. And we’ll be properly using this method later on, so we have to check and see that it works alright.”

Valkyrie Unit One who’d accompanied the party looked mortifyingly at the letter. Unit One alone boasted the same blond twin tails as Monica. A difference being in the overly reserved build of her chest.

“Kuh, when we’re much more useful than some bloody letter…”

Mirana also wrote something on a blank sheet with a special ink. She inserted it into the pouch around May’s neck.

“It’s important, so you just have to bear with it. And did you tell

Lyle that May was coming over?”

Unit One made a pose, and spoke expressionlessly.

“Of course. He has already entered Faunbeux, with hostages from the Margrave, and it seems he is preparing for negotiations. I’ve informed him of the rendezvous point.”

May shook her head.

“No, as long as we’re close, I can at least make out his presence, you know. All I have to do is feel for the Jewel he carries, anyways.”

When May mentioned the Jewel, Novem looked down a little.

(Why… do the ancestors deny me, I wonder. I do want to meet them so.)

Immediately deciding there was some sort of reason behind it, Nobem raised her face, and went into preparations…

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Entering Faunbeux from Bahnseim, entering a town near the brim, we got into contact with the lord charged with the stretch of the border.

From Cartaffs and the alliance, we had prepared a number of documents, to seek an audience with the king of Faunbeux.

Under the feudal lord’s surveillance, we spent a few days in town to wait for a reply.

In the lord’s castle, looking out at the castle town I could see out of the room I’d been afforded, I muttered alone.

“The Margrave’s land was the same, but this area really is similar.”

Atmosphere, perhaps? The air of the Margrave’s territory, and the

town on Faunbeux's border were quite similar.

Different from my homeland and Centralle, that sort of air. There were many similar building structures, and while it's not like all of it was reminiscent, that was the feeling I got.

There, the Seventh explained.

『That's because it's not like everything will change just because the one in charge does. There are many things that won't change in a few mere decades. Right… given fifty, a hundred years, perhaps it will be dyed by Bahnseim.』

The Third's opinion was similar.

『It's land stolen from Faunbeux, so it's only natural it's similar. Because the sovereign or ruler shifted, that doesn't mean everything suddenly goes pop. Push it, and there'll be quite a few rebellions too.』

The Fifth, reminiscing.

『That's right. There are always things you could call the rules of the land. There are often reasons they shouldn't be changed, and it's quite a hard field, you know.』

Milleia-san spoke of her own experience.

『When I married off, the differences in their mansion's rules troubled me considerably. I only have vague memory of it, but I was told off by my husband a bit. This is why country bumpkins are… or something. Quite a bit on my eyes as well…』

The seventh laughed.

『Right, he did say something like that. I know how the story ends, so I won't say anything, but it really was an aunty-esque result… truly an aunty-eesque result.』

I wanted to ask just what had happened. But I got the feeling it was something I shouldn't pry into, so I stayed silent.

After a knock sounded on my room's door, Monica and the others came in. Before that had come, I had confirmed they were there with the Skills, so I didn't particularily have anything to say.

Monica relayed the reports from the Valkyries.

"Chicken dickwad, it seems May is headed our way. A letter has been prepared to confirm that previous matter."

In the room, everyone's eyes gathered on Shannon sitting on the sofa. Shannon extended a hand to the baked sweets on the table.

Aria sounded worried.

"Shannon-chan, your reading and writing are up to par, right?"

Clara sounded a little nervous.

"There's quite a bit of insecurity, but she's been especially enthusiastic about it this day. So I think it's alright to trust her."

Having come so far, her usual conduct was raising worry. I turned my eyes to Shannon.

"Shannon, we're counting on you. It's all on you."

After meeting all the eyes around, Shannon puffed out her cheeks.

"Then place some more credibility in me!"

The vital point was to come. We needed Shannon's power by all means. A moment later, the lord of the land personally dropped by our room. His eyes as he looked at me were a little doubtful. I was a man of Faunbeux's hated enemy, the Walt House, so perhaps there was no helping it.

"We have managed to make contact with the messengers. It seems you'll be able to have an audience at once. I can prepare you a carriage, but… shall I?"

As we didn't have a wagon or carriage, he was being mindful. But he seemed wary of how light our luggage was despite our lack of

any of those.

I refused with a smile.

“Thank you. The sentiment alone is enough. If you can prepare a passage permit, or any other necessary forms, that would be more than enough.”

The feudal lord nodded.

“… Is that so. Then I shall prepare them at once.”

Not wanting to talk with me too long, the lord soon left the room.

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Within the Jewel.

We were on the journey to Faunbeux’s capital.

Moving Porter down the highways, we couldn’t help but gather attention. It seems Porter was known in Faunbeux to rumor’s extent. But that no one had ever seen the real thing was the same as in Bahnseim.

Sleeping on such a Porter’s loading tray, I had sent my consciousness into the Jewel.

Today, I saw the Fifth’s memories.

The Fifth’s era of Baronhood. Sitting in a chair of the mansion’s office, the Fifth was looking at the four woman lined up across it.

To his side, his legal wife stood, and stretched.

The Fifth scratched his face with a finger.

『… There is a limit to the number of children a single woman can birth. At most it can exceed ten, but to be blunt, that isn’t enough.

The Walt House has no branch families, or any vassals tied to us through blood.』

Watching him was the legal wife woman. She had met Fredricks through a marriage interview and married him.

At that time, the Fifth had lost the one he loved, and was on the brink in various ways. He swore vengeance, and to efficiently get the land together, he put his hands into everything he could. Having prepared the foundation for the Walt House's military, he fought the units of other territories that proclaimed themselves bandits, and solidified the foundations of war, it seems.

Meaning He didn't have the leisure. The look in his eyes wasn't the kind one of his childhood, it was sharp, with bags under it. Colder than all else.

Such a Fifth… Fredricks opened his mouth before the four women.

『My heir will be chosen from this woman's children. All I ask from the rest of you—I care not if they be man or woman—birth children. Once you have and educate them, I will be using them to harden our stronghold in the area.』

A terrible speech. If I was told to say such a thing to Novem or the others, I would refuse full force.

But the women nodded. When I sent a look to the Fifth seeking an explanation, he was ruffling up his hair. Was that embarrassment?

『.. There was some money the Fourth had been saving. So I used it. I sought out proficient women from far and wide. Because of that, I was treated as a womanizer, but at that time, I couldn't care less. These four were came from Imperial Noble houses, and while they were worlds apart from Provincial Nobles, what they all shared at the time, was that they had no money. There were various reasons, but I searched for houses with such circumstances, and searched out talented women from them. Well, if you want to phrase it poorly, it was human trafficking.』

A relationship where both sides had given up on a happy married

life. Looking at it felt lonely. The four women seemed to understand, as they didn't ask for much.

But when the scene changed, that didn't seem to be the case.

One of his mistresses showed Fredricks a letter from her house. Before the shrinking woman, he confirmed its contents.

『… The Walt House shall take attendance? They should be aware of our relations. So we just have to go there together?』

The woman was hanging her head, but she raised her head in surprise from Fredricks response.

『Y-yes! It seems my House wants to show they have a connection to the Walt House. Um… they want you to take along the Walt House's troops, and show their prowess to the other Imperial Nobles, it seems.』

The mistress was an Imperial Noble daughter, , yet the letter wrote for the Feudal Lord Fredricks to take his troops along to Centralle.

The Fifth explained.

『Imperial Nobles had merit in linking arms with us. Troops. Imperial Nobles can live at the capital, but their income comes from elsewhere. So they have to hire people, and there's a fundamental limit to that. For all houses, if they're of the same rank, they hold the same power there. Though there's some slight differences.』

It changed by post, but even so, it wasn't a large gap. Because the monetary sum they were allotted for it was the same. But if they united with a powerful feudal lord, the story was different.

『To intimidate the surroundings, you simply need more troops. We can gather this many people, and move them. If you can show it, you'll put your foes on guard.』

"Fifth, so… the two of you went to Centralle?"

『Yeah, we led some troops there. From the Fourth's time, the Walt House had been steady in its land management, after all. While

there were traitors, we were growing steadily, so we could at least dispatch men. With the talents we raised, we even had commanders to spare.』

Returning my eyes to Fredricks, he had stood form his seat.

『I'll prepare. Tell your House I'll send one thousand. But leaving the territory for prolonged periods is foolish. Our stay will be a short one.』

The woman looked a little surprised, but she nodded a few times.

"That's surprising. I thought you would treat them more coldly."

The Fifth stared at me.

『At the time, I was repenting a bit. But I had already welcomed in mistresses, and do you think I could believe I could stop my revenge at that point in time? I held responsibility for taking them in to begin with. I wanted to answer their wishes to a plausible extent.』

I found out he was surprisingly faithful to his wife and mistresses. Or rather, he really should have taught that faithfulness to the Sixth.

The Fifth let out a sigh.

『… When you have more than thirty children, treating them all equally is impossible. So I tried hard for these girls who looked after all the children. They had fulfilled their role, yet they began working for the House, and even helped us rise in status. So at the very least, I thought I could make it so my children wouldn't have to go through the same memories as me.』

The same memories meant he wanted to break down the situation where we were surrounded by nothing but enemies. To the vassal houses, sending sons and daughters that carried the blood of true nobility was to increase allies.

And so the dissatisfaction wasn't turned towards Fiennes… the Sixth, the Fifth completely refrained from being involved with his children, it seems.

『Even I would've preferred a single wife. She'd have supported me. Having a boy, and some kids after that. I thought time and again to stop along the way… but I was scared of Fiennes ending up in the same environment as me. I was… scared of it.』

As he said that, he looked down.

『I thought of nothing but to use my children in my revenge. So what now, I thought? My parents cried when they looked at me. It was painful. Truly painful. That mama would cry for someone like me. But I had no idea what I could do.』

Moving with vengeance in his heart, by the time he noticed it, he couldn't stop. When I listened to the heavy stories of the Fifth, I began thinking over what I would've done there. Think it was alright to take it slow, and gradually build up the foundation in the area?

If all the girls were killed, would I have thought to take level-headed vengeance like the Fifth? Perhaps I'd have picked fights around, and exhausted out my territory.

Did Milleia-san notice the Fifth's sentiment? Is that why… after thinking that much, the surrounding scene changed.

The Fifth's sorrowful expression did a complete change, and he began panicking.

『L-Lyle! Leave this room at once!』

"Eh? But some sort of memory is…!!"

The scene changed, and when color returned to gray, the legal wife was talking with Fredricks in the hall.

『Fredricks, it will be troublesome if you get something so expensive. How many daughters do you think you have? Put on a show for one marriage, and if a difference in treatment comes with the other daughters' marriages to come, their dissatisfaction shall…』

In regards to the merchant who'd dropped by the mansion, the Fifth

ignored the woman's opinion.

『Make a complete set with that one. I'll prepare the money in gold. Ask her and her daughter for the specifics.』

Among the number of samples he had brought, the merchant looked delighted as the most expensive was selected. What's more, an immediate payment in gold multiplied his joy even further.

『I'll talk with the craftsmen at once. If you have any wishes in regards to the design, then say anything. And milady, I've brought quite a few samples, so would you like to go over them?』

When Fredricks immediately tried to leave the spot, the woman grabbed his arm.

『Fredricks, no matter how you look at it, it's too expensive. Our income isn't the problem, but with this many goods, the charge will…』

『It's fine. No problem. I'll just use whatever I have on hand.』

『On hand, wait… you mean.』

The woman sighed. Fredricks turned, with a bit of an awkward look on his face.

『I-I at least want to put out the money to prepare for them going independent. You definitely can't tell them I prepared it. You got that, definitely!』

The woman looked tiredly as Fredricks left as if running off. But she looked just a little happy. And to the merchant man.

『You will forget everything my husband just said. Understood?』

『Y-yeeEeess!!』

On the sharp glint in her eyes, the merchant nodded his head with amazing force a number of times.

The woman sighed, and looked down as she smiled a bit.

『Good grief, he could just honestly rejoice. It's because he's so awkward that…』

Once Fredricks had completely disappeared from the scene, the surroundings turned grey. I turned my eyes to the Fifth, and he was hiding his face with both hands.

"What, so you did do things for them, didn't you."

『… Weapons and horses for the boys. Trousseau for the girls. It's important, dammit. And you know, aren't you forgetting how Novem sold her own dowry at the start to get your things in order? I'm sure I'm a failure as a bride's parent, but even I was taken aback by that one.』

On the Fifth's words, I let my eyes wander.

"I-I swore I'd get it back for her one day… but 'now's an important time' she keeps saying, and she won't accept it from me at present, so…"

For some reason, the air between us grew dubious.

『… So, what are you going to do?』

"About what?"

When I tilted my head, the Fifth covered his face with his right hand. And he spoke to me.

『I'm asking who you're going to make legal wife! Listen here, in this world, equality's a dream within a dream. It's only natural there's a number one. Are you going to choose Novem, Aria, or Miranda? The ones who tagged along from the start? Or the ones with considerable power like Elza or Gracia? I'll just say it, but if you choose based on national power, Ludmilla is all you've got.』

"… Um, I didn't hear Clara's name in that."

『Idiot! Clara isn't a noble! And you think she can take command of those members? Shannon's also out. It'll create discord between her and Miranda. Eva and May are out of the question. Vera will be

difficult with her position as a merchant's daughter. It isn't just those girls. The Houses backing you, and the countries! It isn't just you alone!』

Hearing the portion I had been leaving vague, I felt troubled. Who would I make legal wife?

To be completely honest, if it was for power, then Ludmilla-san. But if I did that, I got the feeling that even after the war, there would be much more strife to follow.

"Hey, can't we just discuss who's best in the Jewel?"

When I joked around, the Fifth grew seriously angry.

『There's no way that's good at all! You're not playing harem here, damn fool!!』

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… The round table room.

Milleia was peeking into the room of memories from outside.

『Good grief, both the Fifth and Lyle are no good.』

The Seventh touched a hand to his chin, as he looked intrigued over the Fifth.

『So he wasn't as cold a man as has been passed by mouth. I see, so that's why the Sixth followed him.』

The Third shook his head to the side.

『Good grief. Me and Max's responsibility must've been heavy. At the very least, if he had a little sibling or two, perhaps it'd have been different.』

Seeing the Fifth put his utmost effort into teaching Lyle about

harems, Milleia laughed, and turned off the image.

『When all's said and done, you can say whatever you want. Because it's impossible to change the past, he can only do his best for now. Now then, I've gone out of my way to leak the Fifth's memories, but their talks have gone in a strange direction.』

It seems it was her doing that the Fifth's memories were arbitrarily broadcast. And the three seemed to be having fun.

『I can't wait to see who he'll wife! For me, I guess it's still Novem-chan after all? I mean, she even sold her dowry to make money for him!』

『No, no, no, you can't underestimate the power of a large country. Ludmilla is the safe choice.

『What are you all talking about? Miranda is the alpha and the omega. My great granddaughter for crying out loud. Anyone else is out of the question.』

The three of them then went into some predictions. And the Third laughed a little sadly.

『… Well, it's not like we'll be there to see it to the end, so I'd really like if Lyle told us his decision alone. But with him like that, it looks like it'll be hard.』

Thinking of their own roles ending, they wouldn't be able to see the conclusion of it all. As the Third muttered that, the Seventh and Milleia also nodded a little sadly…

Avengers of Faunbeax

The Kingdom of Faunbeux.

Its central capital was located close to Bahnseim.

It had originally been at the center of the country, that capital of Faunbeux. But that land west of Bahnseim was largely shaved away by the Walt House. Because of that, it felt like the capital had grown closer.

Faunbeux's royal palace.

While not to Bahnseim's level, it was still a country classified as large on the continent. The palace was brilliant, and built practical.

Its military strength wasn't given too high an evaluation, but that one was also the Walt House's fault. By our estimates, it was a country capable of moving one hundred thousand. And a country we wanted at all costs in order to fight the Bahnseim Kingdom.

So in that country's audience chamber, I participated alone as a representative of my comrades, exposing myself to the malice-filled eyes around.

I stood on the red carpet, and before the king and queen, surrounded by the authorities, I felt a cold sweat break out on my back.

And yet in the Jewel, the Seventh reminisced.

『Oh my, I've seen quite a few of them before. Of course, when I was chasing them around the battlefield, or holding them as prisoners of war, that is.』

Faunbeux's problem with the Walt House came about in the Sixth's and Seventh's time. If I'm to believe my ancestors' words, Bahnseim was also to blame. But when Faunbeux came to invade, the Sixth and then the Seventh drove them back, and took their territory along the way.

Milleia-san laughed to herself.

『They're already old men, but there are some of the previous generation who remember the humiliation of the past. I'm sure their stomachs are doing somersaults right around now.』

The Third seemed to be thinking seriously…

『Shall we assertively rile them up here, or incessantly rub salt into their old wounds… damn, it's troublesome how both choices sound like they'd be so interesting.』

… It's no good. He's the usual Third. Among my ancestors, could it be the Third was actually the most ill natured? I've gotten about to thinking of it like that.

The king of Faunbeux opened his mouth at me.

"Now then, for what sort of business have you come by my country of Faunbeux? Let us hear it from your mouth. Whelp of the Walt House."

He suddenly broke into a rude tone, but the Seventh spoke out as if he remembered something.

『I've got it! This guy's the crown prince I took captive! That prince who lost so miserably to me on his first campaign became king… in that case, he should be in his late forties. The crybaby from that time sure has grown up splendidly.』

The Fifth, uninterestedly.

『What from our point of view, it seems he's the whelp here. Oy, Lyle… how about you rile him?』

But there, Milleia-san let out some words I never expected from her.

『You can't just rile him. Then talks won't get anywhere, and talking with this person holds no real meaning. It seems our real target is watching us from the back.』

The individual Milleia-san called the real target. With the Sixth's

Skill… Spec… the displayed individual was peering at us from the side of the throne. The glance I felt from the backstage wasn't particularily filled with any malice or resentment. Simply a glance as if to evaluate me.

"… I believe you are aware of the unsettling movements throughout the Kingdom of Bahnseim. The countries that border it are already harboring a sense of crisis. You've already confirmed the letter from the four nation alliance near Beim to the east, and of Cartaffs to the north, have you not?"

On my words, his majesty scoffed.

"Why not say it as it is? A lassy of the Walt House is tearing up your country. Truly, what a troubling clan, you Walts. And this time, you're cheating the surrounding countries to have a war amongst siblings. If you don't call it troubling, then what else is it?"

He sure is a blunt one. It's true looked on from the outside it seemed it was a hegemonic sibling feud pulling the entire content into its midst. But the future of the continent depended on it.

"Then will the Kingdom of Faunbeux play the fool? We have already established cooperation with the southern land of Djanpear. All that is left is the west… yet it does not seem Faunbeux will assist us. Then I will have to inquire elsewhere."

It's not like I'm forcing you guys into it, is the standing I wanted to have in this conversation. Saying it like that implied we didn't really need them. Worse come to worse, there wouldn't be a problem as long as they didn't intervene.

If they attack when Bahnseim is going through turmoil, then all it meant was that the Margrave had his work cut out for him.

When he heard the name of Djanpear, he looked a little surprised. I'm sure the news of their cooperation had yet to reach.

"So you've found allies in the south. The leader of Djanpear was a man… so not only women, you've gotten around to seducing men as well? You siblings sure are a troublesome bunch."

Perhaps he held considerable resentment, as Faunbeux's King's attitude towards me remained considerably cold. At that moment, I heard a quiet laugh.

Hearing that voice, I turned to the side of the throne… a place where a curtain had been prepared. The one poking out their face a little was a slender woman with pink hair. She looked even more imposing than before, but it seemed her face had more shadows than then.

The surrounding air suddenly calmed down, and his majesty gave a purposeful clearing of his throat. The queen looked somewhat nervous as well.

"… I have considered the matter of cooperation as well. It is difficult to forgive the disgrace Bahnseim has dealt to us. I'll let you talk the specifics later."

His majesty had been insistently offensive towards me the whole time, but come this far, he suddenly turned meek. From the start, I'm sure they'd already discussed within the country how they were unable to let Bahnseim be. But why would his attitude change that suddenly?

From the Jewel, I heard Milleia-san's voice.

『Lyle, the real target's out. This air sure brings me back. While it's only a vague memory, I do recognize it. You could call it controlling things from the shadows. Now then, from here on's the real deal.』

… I swallowed my breath. But the Seventh opposed as if to spit his own out.

『Pulling strings from the shadows, eh? Takes one to kno…』

Without the end of it coming out, today once more, the Seventh was shot through. Listening to the burst of gunpowder, I thought over the woman who'd shown a sliver of herself… 【Lianne Faunbeux】.

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Withdrawing from the audience chamber, the room we were led to wasn't a room for meeting or discussion.

No, it was a space to discuss, but one quite mismatched for such important matters.

Chairs were placed across a round table. Atop the table, a few varieties of snacks had been prepared, there wasn't a sign of any humans around.

The man who led me left the room, leaving me there alone.

"I've got a bit of a bad feeling about this."

As I muttered that, I felt someone's presence in the back of the room. A presence felt from behind a curtain, but up to that point, I couldn't sense anyone there, even with my Skills.

"That's in bad taste, Lianne-sama."

When I said the hidden individual's name, some pink hair peeked out from behind the curtain, leading to a women with an even greater atmosphere than before. In the past, she had a strong air of sorrow, but now it wasn't just her aura as royalty. She had an air as if to intimidate her opponents.

"Oh? It's the first I've been noticed so soon. Even so, it has been a while, Lyle Walt."

Snickering to herself, she approached the table, and took at a seat at it on her own. In that room without attendants or assistants, she poured tea from a pot she's prepared.

It didn't look the actions of a princess.

"This is quite, how should I put it…"

Lianne motioned me to sit, leaning back over the backing of her chair, and looking up at the ceiling.

“I know what you’re saying. But for now, I’m doing everything myself. There’s a brother of mine who tried something like assassination out of fear of me, you see. So making the tea and meals is something I can do myself.”

The Fifth sounded surprised.

『As long as the ingredients are poisoned, I fail to see the point.』
“The ingre–”

Before I could finish, Lianne-san sipped some tea and explained.

“I go out and buy it myself. I’ve a convenient Skill of my own. It’s called 【Trick】, and once grown, it gave me 【Magic】 and 【Magician】… quite convenient. It’s got a lot of restrictions, but slipping out of the castle to do some shopping is simple enough.”

A Skill to easily slip through the defenses of a Castle… I’m pretty sure Albano-san had the same Skill.

It could only work on the level of mischief, he had said. And Lianne-san before me should be the same. When we last met, she had committed the mischief of shattering a glass.

“… Could I ask the reason you’re so feared?”

Lianne-san impolitely rested both elbows on the table, leaving her chin on her hands, and tilting her head a little as she smiled at me.

“That’s an easy one. You see, when I was shipped back, there were some big and little brothers, and sisters, who said I had ruined everything. My parents were also cold, so I did a bit of mischief on them. And when I kept it up day after day after day, they came to me and apologized. But just one of my brothers came with an assassin instead. He was a scary one, so I had that brother sent to live a quiet life far away. He should have settled peacefully into the countryside by now.”

It does seem she drove her brother to the outskirts.

This snickering Lianne-sama didn’t seem to be the lovely princess she once was.

But that wasn't a problem. I was already surrounded by even scarier members, so this wasn't enough to fluster me. But the Third groaned.

『This is heavy. This child is real heavy. If we add her, will Lyle be able to endure or not… yeah, it'll work! It'll just barely work!』

The Fifth denied his opinion full force.

『Nope. This girl is dangerous. If want to ask how dangerous, dangerous enough to contest with the Sixth's wife. Some terrible pain is to descend on Lyle's stomach, so you'd best stop it at that!』

The Seventh gave a bit of a laid-back opinion.

『It's true, mother sure was scary. But she's of a lineage you could put against Ludmilla's. I've no objections to blood, and personally, I say there isn't a problem.』

Milleia-san, enjoying herself.

『Brod-kun's opinion sure is useless. But my brother's wife, huh… that's formidable. Though she wasn't hostile towards me.』

When it comes to the Sixth's wife, she was the one he confessed to and married. With lifeless eyes, the scenes where she threw bloodcurdling looks at any woman who so much as got close to the Sixth was terrifying.

If she's at the same level as my great grandmother, doesn't that make her considerably dangerous?

Lianne-sama looked at me and smiled.

"I've heard your rumors. You did quite a bit in Beim. I heard you were also involved with the rebellion in Cartaffs, and that's also true, isn't it? Do you really intend to fight Celes?"

When her expression turned serious, I nodded. I had no intent to give a vague response to that.

"I will fight her. And of course, I'll win. Right now, I'm doing the

preparations for it.”

“And one of those preparations is our country, I see. It’s true you have a need to suppress Bahnseim’s west. Cartaffs in the north, and the countries gathered around Djanpear to the south… what plans have you for the east.”

I corrected my posture.

“I’ll do something myself on the eastern front.”

All she had to say to that was an, ‘is that so’.

“The atmosphere in the audience chamber… it felt as if you were the one ruling, Lianne-sama.”

On my words, she laughed.

“Just Lianne is fine. We’re both avengers all the same. I’m, you see… I’m going to count on you. To one day get revenge on Rufus who abandoned me… and Celes, I’m controlling Faunbeux from behind. If there’s anything you need for that sake, just say it. I’ll prepare it all for you. No matter what cost need be paid.”

Lianne-sama… no, Liane’s eyes were serious. And the first name she gave out for the target of her revenge wasn’t Celes who stole her fiancé, but the fiancé【Rufus】. Crown prince of Bahnseim.

The woman blazing with revenge somehow overlapped in my eyes with the form of the Fifth. And I’m sure the Fifth had noticed it to.

『Lyle, this woman is serious. She seriously plans to get her revenge on Bahnseim… no, the crown prince and Celes. Whatever the cost… even if that cost is herself. Stop her. There’s still time.』

Hearing the Fifth’s opinion, I gripped the Jewel to show my affirmation.

“No matter the cost, is it?”

Her eyes were serious.

“If there is a need to sacrifice everything, then we need only carry it out. I’ve nothing left in me but vengeance. You can understand this feeling, can’t you? You want to have vengeance on Celes, don’t you? You want to torture her and watch her beg for forgiveness, don’t you? That is all I want to see. I’ll let you have Celes. And you’ll give Rufus to me. I’ll spend months killing him bit by bit. I’ve done quite some study for it. If you’re interested, I can teach you quite a few interesting means of tort…”

I spoke.

“I’m sorry. I’m aiming for a different sort of revenge. And I’m not thinking of torturing Celes.”

There, I got the feeling the Jewel went just a little warmer.

But Lianne’s eyes were filled with rejection… fed up, as if she was watching a spectacle she couldn’t believe… anyways, her eyes were a pair to rebuke me.

“… Do you think those around would accept such a thing? They’ll only think the Walt House dragged the continent into their family feud. And next, those unsatisfied with you will bare their blades in kind.”

Even so, what I was aiming for wasn’t vengeance against Celes.

It was already time for it to end. Not just Celes. And not only Agrissa or Septem either.

“Again, I’m sorry. I am fighting in order to save. I won’t say I’ll protect the lives of my family. They’ve done enough to warrant it all, and I do think clemency will be impossible. But what we all need is the what’s to come… the future. Unlike your sight that ends at revenge.”

I could see her eyes colored in rage. But she wasn’t one to spit reckless remarks.

“I see, it seems I was the only one who thought we were the same. But that is fine. The condition for our cooperation is for you to hand over Rufus. If you’ve no interest in Celes, could I take her as well?

That is all that is necessary for Faunbeux to cooperate. We'll even take up that empire fantasy of yours. To me, I really couldn't care less."

But to me, that was troubling.

"That would be troubling. I need Faunbeux to hold enough power to hold down its surroundings. As it is, it is insufficient. I want Faunbeux to have enough power to get together the western front."

Lianne sounded uninterested.

"But you're the one taking Bahnseim's land, aren't you? Then you should keep it as vast as you can. And you see, I've no interest in such a thing. Just how they're to be crushed… that's all I live for!"

Seeing Lianne's madness, I felt anxious over whether I could really get her out of it.

True Revenge

The Faunbeux Kingdom.

In a room of the castle at its capital, I gathered the other four, and held a meeting about Lianne.

"… And that's how it is, so it seems she feels considerably cornered. But at this rate, it will be troublesome if Faunbeux is crushed. Does anyone have any good ideas?"

With a stiff face, Aria looked around at the other members before returning her eyes to me.

"What? The princess is in that horrid a state?"

I nodded. She had taken over Faunbeux from behind, and was blazing with vengeance against Rufus and Celes. On top of that, I also explained how she would practice torture with glee.

Perhaps Aria's reaction was the natural variety.

"She's considerably pressed. I do think it's because her standing was terrible once she got back as well."

The princess abandoned by her fiancé. It's true based on how you phrase it, it could buy pity, but the world wasn't always so warm. 'Isn't it that there was a problem with Lianne?' there were people who thought that, is how it is. Not only her family. The country and its authorities, and flowing down to the tip…

Within all that, Lianne ruled the country with her ability. No, rather than ability… perhaps it was a part of the individual's nature.

"I thought she was a real princess, but she's somehow different from my image. Back then, she was rather fleeting, or should I say pitiful…"

Clara lifted her glasses a bit and spoke to me after correcting their positioning.

“Isn’t it alright as long as we get her cooperation? Or could it be you plan on adding Lianne-san to the harem?”

It’s true, if it were only to defeat Celes, then there was no problem with how things were going.

However, that would be leaving a bomb in the country known as Faunbeux. It was scarier to imagine how, after victory, Lianne would go sluggish, and become uninvolved with the nation’s politics.

Would this land fostering so much hatred against the Walt house quietly listen to our side’s say? If it suddenly lost its rule and exploded, I would be troubled.

“The problem comes after the victory. You may laugh at how I’m thinking of the after before we’ve even fought, but that’s the important part. The battle isn’t the end of it.”

Clara nodded as if accepting that. But.

“In that case, Faunbeux needs Lianne-san now. Or perhaps we have to get her to follow us. The Walt House did get her a lot of resentment, so perhaps that one would be difficult on an emotional level.”

On Clara’s statement, the Seventh in the Jewel sounded embarrassed.

『Hmhm, it was quite an overwhelming victory… no, you could even call it our complete victory. We took the crown prince, and a number of important nobles hostage, and made a killing off the ransom. The troublesome ones died in battle, so it took ten years for them to get back on their feet… and the ones taken prisoner surely felt ashamed.』

Meaning the Sixth and Seventh were the cause.

No, I know. Losing is out of the question, and they had to win. But the problem lay in how their victory was so overwhelming that it left a trauma. Because of that, for the past few years, Faunbeux got the reputation of being weak at war tacked onto it.

If I were in their position, I'd definitely bear a grudge.

Aria made a conflicted expression.

"Huh? In that case, it's best Lianne-sama stays in Faunbeux, right? Irrelevant to the harem, as long as you can get Faunbeux to recognize you, isn't that the end?"

Monica who'd been listening silently confirmed the contents of the cups placed before us, and prepared a refill.

"Having so many recognize us would also be difficult, and the problem is the fruition of her revenge… after victory, the gallant lass getting Faunbeux together losing her motivation. For the future's sake, why not just nab her?"

I refuted Monica's opinion.

"Bahnseim alone has considerable land, right? Managing all that will be hell. If possible, I want to solve all the troublesome problems before it comes to that."

The Fifth agreed with me from the Jewel.

『Quite right. Taking a country is flashy, but everything afterwards will feel quite plain, I'm sure. Or rather, We'll have to exhaust the continent well, or it won't work. War on top of reclaiming their territory… I get the feeling that's not enough for Faunbeux to stop.』

The Third was the same.

『It's a deep-rooted issue. Of all things, the ones in power are the traumatized generation, so it's needlessly tangled. While we're at it… why not just a quick change of heads?』

Scary. He sure says some scary things. But perhaps a generation shift was the correct method.

Shannon sipped Monica's tea, looking a little perplexed.

"Hey, from what I can tell, that princess still has feelings for the

prince, doesn't she? Isn't that why she can't forgive him?"

I looked at her, and sighed.

"That's precisely why it's so troubling. Her love was deep, so it turned to hatred deeper."

Shannon looked at me, and returned the side.

"And. I'm. Saying! What I want to say is, that princess will definitely detest whoever kills him! At this rate, it isn't a Faunbeux without her, but one with her that will bare its fangs."

Aria, Clara and I looked at Shannon. When you think of it, deplorable as she usually was, Shannon had eyes that let her capture the fluctuations of one's heart by the flow of Mana.

"… Really?"

Brimming with confidence, she stuck out her absent chest, and nodded.

"Hmm, this Shannon-sama's eyes are amazing. She hates him for now, but she's still deeply in love. That's why she can't forgive him, is how it feels."

Aria gulped.

"Wait. In that case, our next opponent would be the princess who took over a country by herself? Listen here, I don't really get the back stage and that area, but I do think Lianne-sama is dangerous."

Clara grabbed my sleeve with her fingertips, and when I lifted my face.

"Lyle-san… it's 'mr. lyle's' turn. Make the princess of Faunbeux fall. She'll definitely be troublesome, that princess."

Monica touched her hand to her chin, and extended her own point of view.

"Hmm, even if you're to fight, she isn't the type to perform on the

frontline, but to move around in the back. If what you're saying is true she holds a troubling and elusive Skill. There's no doubt she'll be trouble. And much more ill-natured than a human using Skills to manipulate the psyche. With our current members… she may be more a pain than Ludmilla. On the same level as that vixen Novem. No, if you make a clear enemy of her, her troubesomness may be even greater. No way of telling what means she'd use, after all."

Shannon looked at me and spoke.

"That princess… is scarier than my sister. No, if they fought, my sister would definitely win, but I don't mean that sort of scary… true terror."

So if we beat Celes, in the worst case, a Celes-level monster would be born. No, it was a different sort of threat, so I couldn't compare them.

"… Then what shall I do."

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Within the Jewel.

I held out my right arm to LYLE. He mended the glowing blue light running across it, and kept my complaints company.

『What? A scary princess this time? Why do you keep rolling such BS? Almost everyone around you really is BS.』

Within the room of memories. The room I was once confined.

Sitting on the bed, I averted my eyes from him.

"… T-they're all kind to me, so…"

『That's right. They're kind 'to you', Lyle. Though if you grow lax, it feels a true death match will begin… oh, this one's also terrible.

Just how did she destroy it so thoroughly? What' more, it's been abandoned so long, it's more difficult to repair than I'd ever imagined.』

My Mana flow ripped to shreds by Celes. Trying to repair it, LYLE placed a hand on my back.

That small hand pat me.

『Revenge, huh. She doesn't understand true revenge. And a way that self-destructs can't even be called second-rate. True revenge is… whoa, even here's messed up.』

'I should've treated you sooner' he said and laughed.

And he addressed me.

『… Lyle, I said it right? I want you to save my family. Now here's the question. For 'my and your' family, what do you think saving is?』

As he pat my back and asked, I looked down and answered.

"To kill them. Painlessly, so they don't have to suffer anymore."

I couldn't see what expression he was making. But I'm sure he didn't look so gleeful.

『Correct. And for my manipulated parents, that is the greatest level of salvation we can offer. Though there's the possibility of sheltering them somewhere too. But the parent I know wouldn't accept that. The father I thought more noble than anyone. The kind and proud mother. If the two of them were freed from Celes' grasp, I'm sure they'd choose death. That's who they were.』

Hearing LYLE's words, I felt saddened.

"But I don't have those memories. Hey, can't you return them? I… only have vague memory of them. I want memories of my family. I want to remember them!"

LYLE didn't answer. And he placed his hand on both my shoulders.

It felt my body was getting warmer, and after a while of silence, he opened his mouth.

『… I'm sorry.』

"Eh?"

I lifted my face. I tried to turn, but with him pinning my shoulders, I couldn't look around. Even if I turned just my head, he was looking down, and I couldn't make out his expression.

『I think returning your memories is the right thing. For that sake alone, I'm the Celes-sealed memories the Jewel set free. I'm the memories themselves. To humans, memories are vital. Vital enough to… influence your life.』

"That's precisely why…!"

『That's precisely why!』

Lyle raised his voice.

『That's precisely why I won't give the memories to you. I don't want to. What's important to the Jewel isn't the current Lyle. It's the Lyle who can defeat Celes. For that sake, it's strongly alligned itself to you. But that's not how it should be. I…』

LYLE took his hands off my shoulders.

When I turned, the inside of the room turned grey, and began crumbling away like sand. Once the ashen sandstorm died down, what remained was a room recreating the inside of the Jewel.

In the recreation, the First, Second, fourth and Sixth sat in their own chairs. That gray Jewel interior.

Even if I looked around, the four of them didn't show a reaction to me.

The round table spread out, and once it became like an arena, LYLE gripped his Sabre in his right hand. The Sabre he got on his birthday. The Sabre I carried on.

A ten-year-old form. Such a me took a stance with his Sabre.

“… The usual deal; if I win, you’ll give them back, right?”

Holding my left hand up front, I manifested the Katana I’d been using. Gripping the scabbard, I grasped the hilt in my right hand, and drew the blade.

LYLE laughed.

『Now, your treatment’s over. In your current state, you should be able to output a four or five. Come at me for real. If you want your memories so badly, then beat me and take them!』

Greater power than before entered my body. That power I could barely contain was beginning to adjust to my body. I felt those lines of blue light racing across my body.

LYLE was the same. Approaching me in an instant, he thrust out his Sabre. But I caught its blade under my armpit, and immediately let out a kick.

Swiftly letting go of the Sabre, LYLE leapt to the side, and landed on the floor.

“I can see it!”

Up to that point, it wasn’t easy to follow, but my eyes could keep with LYLE’s speed. And When I slammed the scabbard in my left hand down at him, it hit the floor, and shattered it some.

Leaping up, LYLE gripped his Sabre, and lowered it towards me.

I parried it with my right hand’s Katana, letting sparks fly.

『… Moving on. Lyle, you still don’t understand. The weapons of the ancestors, you can use them like this too!』

What LYLE manifested in his hand was the Sixth’s Halberd. Swiping it horizontally, I received it with the scabbard. Holding it back at its shaft, I tried to kick him away, when LYLE pulled the Halberd back.

The axe portion cut my left hand, and blood flowed.

Throwing down his Sabre, LYLE swung the Halberd he held in both hands. I unhanded the scabbard, and when it hit the ground, it shattered away like glass, and disappeared.

“S-say what?”

『I said it, right? You’re not the only one who can use them. I’m also “Lyle Walt” you know. Even I can use their weapons.』

The Halberd in LYLE’s hands had a strange appearance. The form of the axe and spear, and the length of the handle… they had changed.

I stuck my Katana into the ground, and tried gripping the Halberd myself. The polearm with the form I was used to manifested for me.

LYLE approached, skillfully swinging about his Halberd. Contrarily, I who’d been approached, was slow to react.

“Its reach is…”

『Different, right? That’s right. The Sixth’s Halberd can change from the length of its shaft to the shape of its blade. Why didn’t you ever notice?』

Hearing that, I tried shortening the shaft to counteract him, but this time he extended it… extending it further than ten meters downwards, and climbing as high as the room’s ceiling, there he changed the Halberd to the Bow.

I instantly prepared the Fourth’s Daggers, and deployed them in front of me. The Daggers spun to draw a circle, but he didn’t aim his arrows at me, LYLE shot at everything else… and on the verge of hitting the floor, they changed direction.

“Kuh!”

I used the daggers in both my hands to hit some down, but my right arm and left thigh were pierced through.

『You haven’t mastered the Second’s Bow. Based on how you use it,

you can even do something like that. And…』

What LYLE gripped was the Fourth's Daggers. Feeling him activate a Skill, I abruptly used one as well.

『… Too slow.』

By the time I noticed it, the silver daggers had stuck in all over my body. Collapsing to my knees, the blades disappeared, and the wounds recovered.

After somehow managing to raise myself, I saw LYLE standing on top of the floating daggers. Making footholds out of them, and after springing up, he took out the giant sword this time. The sword the First Generation used was a weapon specialized to destruction.

I also prepared it. When that large sword… that lump of metal met another, I was sent flying.

Rolling across the floor, it was all I could manage not to let it go.

LYLE leaned the sword over his shoulder. That child shouldered a sword larger than his own body, and looked at me.

『The Skills and the weapons… you really are awful at using them. They were all so powerful in essence that you hardly thought over how to use them beyond that. Do you really intend to beat Celes like that? Doesn't look like I can return your memories just yet.』

I grit my teeth and stood. Sticking the First's sword into the ground, and getting to my feet, the Founder of memories was nearby. I got the feeling his attention was directed at me.

"Saying whatever you want… as if you could understand. My memories were stolen, and I couldn't even comprehend that fact; I didn't know anything! Causing nothing but trouble to everyone around, and even that wasn't enough for me… they're my memories, aren't they! Give them back!"

LYLE didn't say anything. He simply lowered the large sword from his shoulder, and took a stance. Sucking in his Mana, that menacing blade changed its form.

I couldn't understand. If he was made with an objective of returning my memories, there should be some reason for him to deny it…

But if I had to take a guess.

"You just don't want to disappear, right? If you return those memories to me, there's no telling what'll happen to you, after all!"

LYLE gave a sorrowful laugh.

『Yeah, that's right. That's right. Even I'm scared of fading away! So if you want them back, then try killing me! Try erasing me!!』

Imitating LYLE, I flowed my Mana into the sword. It let off a blue light, and its form changed. A different change than in LYLE's. We both used all our Skills to take a step forward.

When the two swords collided, and intense shock assailed the room.

Siblings

… A room of memory.

That gray round table room had become like an arena.

The violently clashing blades of silver had taken on shapes as if to reflect their wielders' hearts.

The shape of LYLE's sword was orderly, and practical. But Lyle's large sword was thorny, as if it were made from the scales of a dragon's head, and looked as if it had an open mouth ready to swallow something down.

LYLE held his sword aloft, and let the blades meet. The First Generation Head's Weapon, that large sword of silver's characteristics… it was truly violence and destruction.

And with all the Mana it sucked in, it weighed a heavy burden on its wielder. Lyle had yet to master the use of that weapon.

(Seeking simply because you lack. So you desire it from your heart… are you supposed to be some forever-hungry monster?)

LYLE felt the current Lyle was dangerous. Upon learning he was empty, and with his memories known as LYLE before his eyes, he was trying to recover them by all means.

(We're already different people though.)

But LYLE didn't want to return the memories to Lyle. Regaining those memories held the same meaning as the selfs up to now ceasing to exist.

If Lyle's memory returned, they would both disappear, and a new【Lyle】 would be born. A complete Lyle carrying on both their memories.

(That was the answer the Jewel desired. But… that's no good at all. If it isn't the current Lyle, then even if he beats Celes, there won't be any meaning. The continent will merely be transferred from the

rule of the monster called Celes to the monster called Lyle.)

Regaining it all was the same as releasing a new beast on the field.

So LYLE came to quite a simple conclusion.

— Dissapear without giving Lyle the memories –

That was the result LYLE sought.

Seeing Lyle swing his sword so desperately, LYLE took his stance, and turned the slashes aside. On that blow heavier than the previous one, his mouth curved in delight.

『What's up? If that's all you've got, you'll never get those memories however long you try!』

"Stop looking down on me like that, mr. high and mighty!"

To Lyle who'd lost everything it was only natural he would want to regain the memories of his family. But if he did, he would recall all of their kindness. When it came to killing his parents and Celes… would Lyle be able to withstand it?

Their swords met again, emitting sparks and blue light as the lit the gray round table room.

Various effects on their bodies from their Skills…

At that moment, LYLE had brought out all of Lyle's ability. No, he had dragged it out. He had dragged out power surpassing his limit, and LYLE had prepared a stage for him to use it all.

(Right, that's how it should be. This is all I can do… Lyle!)

Both landing on the ground, the held up their weapons. From the impacts and shockwaves, their clothes were in tatters.

LYLE confirmed the Mana was accustoming itself to Lyle's body, and channeled his own into his sword.

As a bluff…

『Look, with this, I'll do the honor of erasing you. If I do, I'll finally be free from this Jewel. I'll finally be out on the surface!!』

Raising a laugh tinged with madness, he used the Walt Family way, and riled Lyle. As LYLE predicted, Lyle took the same action with his sword.

He was a little too honest with himself, thought LYLE.

『Copying me again? How about learning some individuality?』

"Oh shut it!"

Each sword changed shape again, LYLE's orderly one silhouetted mainly of straight lines, and Lyle's ominous monster head. Stepping in, they both initiated attacks to pierce through their foes.

The ground carved out where they kicked off, and smoke clouds rose.

『That's how it should be.』

As LYLE said that, he tilted his sword's tip a bit to the right…

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As both sides clashed, the swords stuck in deep.

My left arm was blown off, while LYLE's small body was pierced into, as he spit up blood. His sword disappeared, and as his body collapsed, it showed no signs of regeneration.

"At the end, why did you…"

I tried erasing my sword, but he grasped its blade with both hands so I couldn't pull it out.

『… If someone's going to disappear, it has to be me, right? I couldn't stop Celes. I couldn't save my parents. So what good would

come of someone like that reviving so late in the game? The one who endured the hardships was you, Lyle. You held through. You did a good job. Lyle… you're much stronger than me.』

When I let go of the sword, he fell forward. I caught him, the silver sword still stuck into his body without going out, it seemed to be destroying it from within.

"Oy, I still have things I need to ask you! What about the memories!?"

LYLE laughed.

『Do you really need something like that? Well, can't someone disappearing at least take that much as a parting gift? I'm going to fade away, and my existence really will be wiped out. You're fine just as you are.』

I couldn't understand what he was saying. I kept trying to erase the silver sword, but it wouldn't listen me. Gripped by LYLE, it looked as if he was trying to destroy himself.

"What did you want to do! After riling me so much!"

『… I already said it. I want you to save them. When I told you to save my family, you understood what I meant. So I'm already satisfied with that. I couldn't accept what the Jewel was thinking. So I chose this path. In the first place, if you get your memory ba… Geh!』

LYLE spat up blood. I was about to tell him not to talk, but he held up his right hand to stop me, and manifested a blue gem from its palm.

『Lookie, it's your second one.』

Last time, I'd received one from Septem-san. And LYLE was trying to give me my second.

When I accepted it, once more, it was absorbed into my body, and disappeared.

“This is?”

『There are three. Collect all three. If you do, your third Skill will awaken. It’s really special, and it may be unfair, but you’ll definitely need it… ahah, looks like that’s it for me.』

There, LYLE forced himself to his feet, and stabilizing himself, he waved his hand at me. While blood was pouring out of his mouth, he made a smile.

“Why did you…”

『Byebye, brother of mine. It was fun. I’m sure if I had a little brother, it would be like this… yep, Celes was cute, but little brothers sure are nice. And the answer is simple.』

I was being driven out of the room. My body was being forcibly removed from the premise.

『I’m your big brother. It doesn’t matter if you don’t think of me that way, I just want to put on a show for my brother who’s going to do his best. And Lyle, you already…』

The moment he faded from sight, I was sure he said it.

『… Lyle, you already have a family, don’t you?』

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… The gray round table room.

Appearing in it was Milleia, a gun gripped in her hand.

Before LYLE on the brink of fading, she pointed the muzzle.

『… The Jewel’s will was for Lyle to regain his memories. You’d go as far as to defy it…』

LYLE looked down at his crumbling body, and smiled.

『All's well as long as he wins in the end. It's that train of thought that makes it a failure. The goddess should really get her shit together and learn already. There's no such thing as perfection. It's true Lyle's no good alone. I'm sure he can't beat Celes alone. And what of it? That's exactly why Lyle will beat Celes. That's exactly why he won't be alone.』

Milleia kept the gunpoint aimed on him.

『Gain the cooperation of others to grasp victory. Truly, it would be hard for Lyle once he achieved power that caught up to hers. But at this rate, his prospects of victory are…』

LYLE pressed the barrel to his forehead. As if telling her to aim properly.

『Isn't that precisely why its fine? He'll win as a human. Goddess, monster, you all won't stop flapping your lips over that mess. As long as you don't let a human win, it'll never end.』

His feet shattering like glass, LYLE fell forward, his arms destroyed as well, leaving him with only a torso and head.

The silver sword disappeared, and Milleia tucked her gun away.

She gently lifted him up. To the end, LYLE was smiling.

『Any words you want to leave? It can be to anyone.』

On Milleia's words, LYLE tried opening his mouth, but shook his head.

『Too late for my family. Tell Lyle he sure is a troublesome sod, and the ancestors that I'm leaving him to them. That sound alright?』

Milleia nodded. LYLE gave an intrigued laugh.

『Also, about the princess troubling Lyle, I have a proposal. Won't you come on board? It's sure to be interesting.』

Milleia looked a little fed up, but the inclined her ear to his suggestion.

『What is it? What sort of resolution?』

『It's easy. If it were me…』

Once she'd heard LYLE's proposal, and broke into a smile, LYLE had completely crumbled and faded away…

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The next day.

I asserted that I wanted to use the audience chamber again.

The troubled king and queen. And the authorities looked at my face so early in the morning, and were already grumbling complaints.

I really was hated.

His majesty reluctantly opened his mouth.

"It's troublesome for you to request an audience two days in a row, you know? We've had to greatly change today's schedule, and those in the castle are frantically running around to correct it. Good grief, this is why people of the Walt house are…"

There, the Third spoke in a voice lower than usual.

『Now, Lyle… use my Skill. It's alright, the first stage is enough. Rip open the old wounds on his heart, and rub salt into them. 』

The Fifth was also on board.

『If this guy was just a bit better at containing his feelings, it wouldn't have come to this. How awful.』

The Seventh was quieter than yesterday.

『… Now, have him remember the terror of the Walt House.』

The authorities once taken as prisoners of war. And the once-upon-a-crown-prince exposed to such shame. What we were doing was simple. Quite simple indeed.

“I am truly grateful that you answered to my request today.”

In regards to my smile and thanks, I received some unsavory looks from around. But my Skill… the Third’s 【Mind】 showed them a certain scene.

Diagonally behind me… the Seventh was visible. Who chased around his majesty and the leaders, they should’ve been able to see the big bad behind their trauma. And the trauma the Seventh caused had made a nice gap in their hearts to take advantage of.

The Seventh that was a simple illusion opened his mouth.

『Leaning back in your throne before my grandson, that crybaby whelp really has grown remarkably. It seems someone has to chase him about again.』

Starting with the king, the traumatized authorities opened their eyes wide, and suddenly twitched, their breathing beginning to go out of order.

“What seems to be the matter, your majesty? Ah, that’s right. I was thinking to tell you about a matter I couldn’t bring up yesterday.”

The Seventh behind me spoke the words the Seventh in the Jewel had thought up.

『I see… Why don’t you return the favor of how lenient I was on your ransoms? So your tears of joy were really just for show, huh? So be it.』

The Seventh spoke, and I actualized it. The phantom Seventh went on.

『You were crying tears of joy with how little I let you go for, but it does seem the words you spoke of how you’d never forget that debt

was a lie. Now about the land of Faunbeux father and I cut off. Hmm, why don't I have my grandson cut away the rest of it. Along with your heads, of course.』

Leaning forward, his majesty had begun to sweat. He was shaking as he looked at the empty space behind me.

Around, seeing the shaking ministers, those oblivious began to cry out. For all their eyes were fixed diagonally behind me.

"Your majesty, what has happened? Are you feeling ill? Someone, suspend this audience…"

The queen worried for him, and tried to close the meeting, but the king himself.

"W-wait! Keep it going. Continue!"

He was blatantly staring behind me in fear. I smiled.

"Is that so. That's nice. It was an important talk, so I really did want you to hear it out."

The Seventh behind me glared around.

『It's a request of my grandson. You'll hear it out, won't you? If you don't want to be chased down as you were, you'd best listen carefully.』

There were a number of nodding old men around. The untraumatized authorities were unable to understand what was going on, and could only look on the scene.

I turned to the king.

"It is joyous the day the Walt House and Faunbeux join arms, and forgive and forget the wrongs of the past. How about it, won't you offer a princess to me?"

There, the untraumatized queen and ministers.

"What insolence! And who said we'd forgive and forget!? The blood

of Faunbeux royalty isn't so cheap! Especially not to a Walt like you!"
"Your highness, permission to slay him on the spot please!"
"Who in the hell said we'd forgotten our hatred towards the Walt House!?"

An agitated audience chamber. But half were silent. Of course they were. For the Seventh looking at them was speaking.

『Oh, you'll fight? That sounds fun. Let's see, let's find out who here's gotten strong. And have piece of mind, my grandson is stronger than me. Is one on one alright? Or would you prefer a war? Now decide. How will he chase you until you burst into tears again?』

As the Seventh sent a belligerent smile, the king and his men looked on the verge of tears.

And his majesty proclaimed loudly, while the other traumatized ones hopped onto the ship.

"S-splendid! The day a period graces our long years of strife! I-I think it's a splendid idea. A-a daughter, was it? We shall imme-immediately start… talks on who's best suited."
"A wonderful proposal!"
"Truly an auspicious occasion! It will surely be a wondrous day for Faunbeux!"

Their eyes were swimming. Dripping with sweat, they were in clear dismay. I'm sure they were recalling what carved their traumas. Their bodies were shaking.

The queen turned her eyes to such men of authority.

"W-what are you saying… have you forgotten!? Just what sort of hardships the Walt House has forced us to taste!? And you still call yourselves nobles of Faunbeux!? The one before our eyes is a man of the Walt House!"

But my next words knocked her to silence.

"Your majesty, and dear queen."

“Y-yesh!?”

He bit his tongue, but no one cautioned him. They didn’t have such leisure.

“I’m thankful that you’ll hear out my wishes. Carrying on, I would like to nominate Princess Lianne.”

Hearing that, the room went silent.

Everyone had been looking for some poor sap to push Lianne on, and it seems they had much to think about.

… Right, that was the final resolution LYLE had come out with. But in what was to come… I couldn’t say it was really any good for Lianne countermeasures.

I was nervous over whether LYLE’s plan was any good or not.

Faunbeux's Decision

To speak from conclusions, Faunbeux was to shoulder one corner of Bahnseim's encirclement.

A condition you could call extraordinary: it would become the center of putting the surrounding nations to work and getting together the continent's west.

The reason for their motivation was the territory governed by the Margrave of Resno… the return of former Faunbeux land, and for a reason even greater than that…

The woman with disheveled hair was on top of me while I was lying on the floor of Porter's loading tray. Both our clothes were a mess, and our breaths were out of order.

Having heard that much, it's not like I don't see how it could sound like a spicy story, but the fact she was on me was by my judgement.

"T-that hurt…"

"How dare you… how dare you disrupt my plans!"

A bloodcurdling expression. On top of that, looking up at her form from below made her face even more terrifying. I'm sure this will come back in my dreams someday. Or rather, her extended arm… her hand was strangling my neck.

"Hey, get off of Lyle!"

Aria hurriedly tried to tear her away, but even she who trained on a daily basis was hard-pressed. Monica put away the tools in her hands, leapt towards me, and tried to separate us.

But her nails were digging in, so it hurt. Blood was coming out.

"C-chicken, you're bleeding!"

Shannon to Monica.

“Don’t go wild in such a narrow space/ Would you like some medicine?”

Shannon lifted the seat of Porter’s sofa area and took out some medicine. Having seen the actions of this ghastly woman, the grandson of the Margrave of Resno, Blaeubeigh, clung to his mother Parselena-san in fear.

Porter came to a sudden stop, and Clara showed her face down below.

“Um, you’re being noisy… uwah.”

Clara inferred the situation, looked at Lianne and I, and approached. She took the medicine box from Shannon, took out some ointment, soaked it into a cloth, and pressed it against my neck. While my wound was sealed, the rampaging Lianne before my eyes looked like she would leap at me at any moment.

… To summarize. When Lianne who’d taken over Faunbeux castle was pushed onto me, they promised their cooperation with glee. They stuck various reasons onto the surface, but they were definitely rejoicing that they were free of her curse.

Lianne had lost all the authority she gained in Faunbeux to me and my family.

The Fifth seemed worried for the cowering Blaeubeigh-kun.

『This will become a trauma. Third, can mind seal memories, or…』

The Third laughed.

『Hahaha, no way. My Skill isn’t that powerful, and with some trigger, it’ll all come back to him eventually, so I can’t recommend it. If he remembers it at an important point in his future, he’ll go into a panic. But it’s that, you know… this is worse than I thought.』

It’s true Lianne was a more problematic woman than I had thought. Accepting her like that were the final words LYLE had left behind.

And in all actuality, Faunbeux had promised their cooperation, and having seen the Seventh's phantom, the country's authorities and even the king had relapsed into their own traumas.

With that, I doubt they'll lay hands on our side too soon.

Clara finished wrapping my neck, and touched it.

"Are you in any pain?"

"I'm fine, thank you. Could you take care of Aria too?"

Saying that and standing, I went over to Lianne, her hair all ruffled up in Monica's Nelson hold. Aria had also been victim to those nails; blood was flowing from her hand.

As for Lianne, her nails had split, and they were bleeding. Even so, that she still tried to leap at me, it was as if she were a beast.

There, Parselena-san parted from Blaeubreigh and stood. She went in front of Lianne and slapped her.

"… What am I to…"

When I panicked, Milleia-san from the Jewel, and Parselena-san spoke to me.

『Lyle, shut up and watch.』

"I may have been too forward. But I cannot keep watching. So just look on for a while. Princess of Faunbeux, Princess Lianne, correct? I am Parselena… Parselena Resno."

Before Parselena-san's self-introduction, the pinned Lianne looked away to hide her face.

"What's with your conduct? Because you can't accept what's been decided, you go into a frenzy? Your body should be that of a princess… learn already that you cannot defy the verdict of your country."

That gentle and quiet woman stood boldly in front of her. Aria,

Monica, Shannon and Clara kept quiet.

From the gaps in the hair covering Lianne's face, I could see violet eyes. They were the same violet as Novem's, but they didn't hold a fragment of kindness.

"The wife of the Margrave's heir sure speaks proudly to me…"

Pinned down, Lianne tried snapping with her right hand. It was an action to use her Skill…

The Third spoke.

『Lyle, those sorts of Skills won't activate as long as you can throw them out of order a bit. Anything is fine, just use your Skills to interfere.』

… I hurriedly deployed the Second's Skill… Field… and with that interference, Lianne's Skill didn't activate.

With nothing happening but the snap of a finger, Loanne looked at her hand. And she looked at me.

"Getting in my way again… I believed in you… I believed we were avengers all the same!"

I don't need that sort of trust, I thought, as I felt relief that I had sealed her Skill. Parselena-san spoke to Lianne.

"The matter of the crown prince has entered my ears. It was an important matter to the Resno House, after all. But the current you is mistaken."

Lianne glared at her.

"I won't say not to get revenge. And I haven't the right to say it. But attaching yourself to it to such an extent, aren't you still in love?"

Burning with vengeance for the crown prince… Rufus. Parselena-san didn't have any special eyes like Shannnon, or any special Skills, yet she could see Lianne was carrying something in her heart.

Lianne shut her mouth. She let some tears drip down.

“That’s wrong… I’m…”

Parselena-san spoke.

“You weren’t abandoned. You’re alive. And you haven’t been charmed by Celes… how about thinking of it like this? It’s precisely because you were loved, that you were sent away?”

Lianne didn’t say anything. Though her expression said she didn’t accept it.

But hearing Parselena-san’s words, I recalled the words of our founder. That while my parents were under Celes’ rule, yet I was alive, it was either because I was ridiculously lucky or because my parents had desperately resisted.

I had no way to find out. But that’s the truth I wanted to believe.

Parselena-san sent more words to the silent Lianne.

“Find happiness. Even if for revenge… or for love, it’s what’s best for your sake.”

To me, it felt as if those words were directed my way.

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Night.

Stopping Porter, and preparing to camp, I sensed May’s presence. Going outside, a package-laden May made her appearance. Holding up a bag, she.

“Package for you!”

Said and laughed. Seeing her approach with a smile, I recalled the events of the day…

“Please stay like that. Really, never change…”

May tilted her head.

Seeing that gesture, I got the feeling the Fifth in the Jewel smiled a bit.

『Fool, May is a good girl. Way too good a girl for you… and for me.』

She handed the bag to me.

“This letter is the type you’re supposed to give Shannon. And this one is Djanpear’s letter, and this one’s…”

Looking inside, May began to explain. Confirming each item, I went over our future plans with her.

“So what are you going to do now?”

May stretched.

“I’m tired, so I’d like some rest. To eat a lot, and take it easy a few days. Novem and the others will enter Bahnseim from Djanpear, and make their way from south to west, perhaps? They did say they’d go southwest.”

There. The Seventh let his voice from the Jewel.

『Bahnseim’s southwest… the Walt House’s territory, eh? Well, if it’s Novem’s party, I don’t think you need to worry too much…』

The Lords with the greatest territory in Bahnseim, next to the King, was the Walt House. Their land expanded each generation had now gotten them first in Bahnseim. Because of that, if you said southwest, it had to mean the Walt house’s territory. They had vassaled houses around… no, the Forxuz House’s territory was there too.

“From the start, they planned to go if they found the time. I’ll have to hope they do alright, is how it is.”

May laughed.

“Oh right. The King of Djanpear, you see. Said he wanted to drink with you, Lyle. Just the two of you.”

I was opening the letter, but hearing that, my hands stopped. I slowly raised my face, and spoke.

“… I’m no good with ale.”

“I know, right! But Novem already agreed to it, so do your best.”

Anxious over a drink with Djanpear’s king, I opened out the letter, and looked over it. It detailed their results in the country, and the amount of troops they were able to send out.

Miranda’s view on the matter, and the information Eva had collected from her brethren elves were detailed as well.

“… Even if there isn’t a problem with the quality of Djanpear’s soldiers, there is some worry when it comes to fighting on level ground, huh. They were strong in mountains and forests from the start, so I’ll have to make the best of that…”

After thinking a while, I heard the sound of a stomach growl. It was May.

“I’m hungry.”

Giving a smile, I returned to Porter, and told Monica to prepare a meal.

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The morning of the next day.

Shannon stood before Monica, holding the letter with a strained expression on her face.

“Um~, here it says the weather was nice in Djanpear, and stuff like that, here it says the fruit was tasty, and something like that…”

As she read the letter and said some vague things, Monica lowered her hammer. It was a hammer, but its material wasn’t iron, but something lighter. It wasn’t paper either, but when it hit, it made an interesting, ‘meep’ sound.

“I want one.”

When I said that, Blaeubreigh-kun’s eyes were also shining as he looked at the hammer, with its yellow shaft, and red head that sunk down on impact, but instantly reverted to its original shape.

Monica addressed Shannon.

“Yes, you’re wrong. Make sure not to throw some random crap out. The message comparison has failed, so your allowance for the next month has been halfed. Now if you keep failing, it will only get worse for you.”

“Hey! I did my best! And wait, tell them to write in bigger and neater letters next time! They’re all scrunched together and I can barely make it out!”

As Shannon looked on the verge of tears, Clara sent a lifeboat.

“Well, picture books are written quite easy to understand. Perhaps a normal letter is still too difficult for her.”

With help sent her way, Shannon smiled at Clara. But Aria spoke.

“But if you can’t read that, it will be harsh. Do your best, Shannon.”

It really was the case we would be troubled if she couldn’t give a precise reading of them. I’m going to have to plan her further education.

In Porter’s loading tray.

Seeing Lianne sitting in a corner, I hesitated over what words to use to call out to her. While everyone was gathered around Shannon,

Lianne alone was sitting separate from everyone else.

There, Parselena-san spoke to me.

“Just leave her be for now. She’s properly eating, so watching over her is plenty. She’s a strong girl. I’m sure she can get back up alone.”

Seeing Parselena-san keep Blaeubreigh-kun by her side, I felt just a bit of what a mother was.

“Understood. I’ll do just that… we’ll soon be back in the Margrave’s territory. You’ll be with us a while longer, but you will be released after that, so please put up with it.”

She made a bit of a troubled face.

“… When you’re using me as a hostage for negotiations, you sure are kind.”

I made a serious face.

“It’s exactly because you’re negotiation hostages, that I’m treating you so dearly. Well, I’ve some personal thoughts on the matter, and to each his own.”

Having earned Faunbeux’s cooperation, we were on the way back to Margrave Resno’s territory.

Shannon was teary eyed as she read the last letter. There, her hands suddenly stopped. And she looked at Monica.

“… Tell my sister I understand.”

Monica passed the message to the Valkyries. The response that came back indicated there wasn’t a problem, it seems.

“Miranda says there isn’t a problem. Now then, today’s evaluation is… no dessert for two days. Your monthly allowance halfed. Good for you, if you had failed in every letter, you would’ve lost a week of dessert, and your allowance would be cancelled entirely.”

Shannon looked mortified at Monica's refreshing smile. But she was holding the letters preciously.

"Just you watch. I'll get back at you someday!"

At Shannon's line, Monica scoffed.

"Struggle as you will. It will be a splendid spectacle to see how you crawl in the few months remaining."

May looked on the two of them from the side.

"Monica isn't honest. And I'm sure Miranda wanted Shannon to…"

After she said that much, Clara stopped her statement.

"Please don't say it. Let's just leave it at a sister's sentiment."

… I'm sure Miranda had posed Shannon an easy-to-understand problem.

The Third One

The Margrave of Resno's territory.

Having exchanged documents at his castle, I smiled and gestured for a handshake.

But the answer to that was the margrave's sour expression of grit teeth. The reason was simple.

He spoke to me.

"Blaeubeigh and Parselena are safe, I assume?"

A threatening voice. And the eyes of the surrounding knights were filled with malice. Negotiations with the heir taken hostage the surrounding situation taking a favorable wind, the margrave had no choice but to sigh.

After kid… saving the two of them, the Margrave had faithfully made a protest to Centralle. And from his son in Centralle came a letter that showed he didn't particularily seem to care.

It was more than certain he had been charmed by Celes, and the relations with surrounding lords was turning dubious. Because he had protested to Centralle. Wouldn't the army and the Walt House invade? Those sorts of rumors spread.

"Please rest at ease. Even like this, I'm a man who keeps promises."

"Says the kidnapping traitor to his homeland."

His words weren't mistaken. I had put Faunbeux to work on the continent's west, and they were to invade Bahnseim. Now that I'd slathered mud on the relations of the Margrave, and the lords he was supposed to be cooperating with…

He didn't have many options.

Milleia-san spoke as if she was an evil empress.

『That's wrong. The one who abandoned Lyle was Bahnseim. How cruel to call him a traitor.』

The Fifth to her.

『Well, whether Lyle has an excuse, no matter how you look at it, what he's doing is terrible. Of course the Margrave would be angry.』

I turned my eyes outside the window, and there was quilin-form May. On her back were Parselena-san and Blaeubeigh-kun.

"Grandpa!"

"Blaeubeigh!"

Personally throwing open the window in a hurry, the Margrave was looking at Blaeubeigh-kun rather than the large divine beast outside. The surrounding knights looked between the window and me.

"She's a precious comrade of mine, so rest at ease. Don't even think of capturing her. Lest the chances of cooperation slip away."

On my words, they swallowed their spit. The Margrave's path to survaval had already been left with nothing but assisting me.

Thinking of the country's situation, eventually Celes would… no, even now, Celes was needlessly expending the national power. It didn't seem she cared it was tightening the noose around her neck.

The Margrave turned from the window to me.

"Certainly, it's as you promised. You've returned my grandson, and daughter-in-law. When the time comes, Resno will move as promised. But in regards to the territory."

I nodded.

"I shall have them prepare it. Please deal with the matter when you meet with Faunbeux."

Margrave Resno, upon hearing that.

“That’s all well and good, but any poor moves, and Centralle will notice, won’t it?”

I put the documents I received into an envelope, and carefully tucked them away.

“It’s alright. The preparations will be in order before Centralle moves.”

Right. The preparations were already underway.

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… The southwest of the continent.

Stationed there were the representative nobles of Bahnseim, the Walt House’s territory.

At this point, they were a complete enemy territory, and the ones who dropped by that land Lyle couldn’t return to were Novem’s party.

A hood over her head, Miranda looked around with a little wonder.

“We’re not going into the city, I see. If it’s to gather information, wouldn’t there be best?”

Wearing a similar hood, Novem took in the scenery she could see from the carriage. The town they had arrived at was the Feudal Walt House’s origin point, where the Founder through the Third Generation Head had lived their lives.

“… There are too many who’d know my face in the main cities. This is a vital point to the Walt House, so perhaps we’ll be able to gather considerable information here.”

From atop the carriage, Eva removed her hood, and looked outside.

“This is a good place. The atmosphere isn’t bad. Since it was the Walt House’s territory, I thought it would be more serious.”

The army of the Walt House rampaging through the country…

Surely the territory’s interior had been brainwashed by Celes, and turned to a horrid state, she thought. Novem looked down.

“This is an important place. They didn’t let Celes-sama lay hands on it.”

Miranda reacted to her words.

“Didn’t let her lay hands, eh? That must be quite important. But is this place really that important? I’ll admit it’s a large town, but…”

Speaking to the House’s current scale, it wasn’t a major point. Not vital for communications either.

It was for that sake the Fourth had moved the manor.

Novem spoke.

“To the provincial Noble Walt House, it all started here. You say that isn’t important?”

Miranda took her eyes off of Novem, and looked around.

“And so dear Novem will treat it as the holy land. Got it, got it.”

She spewed some sarcasm, but Novem didn’t deny it. It wasn’t only Novem. To the Forxuz House, this place was without a doubt, the holy land.

(The land they met the Walt House once more… no, that person’s bloodline. A person of the Walt House who succeeded his will… the land they met Basil-sama.)

The carriage stopped, and Novem’s party dismounted to look over the town.

And Novem led Miranda and Eva along, and began to walk. What lay at the end of their trail was a graveyard.

Among the numerous lots of tombstones, a separately prepared plot held the names Basil… Crassel, Dewey, Sleigh… the gravestones marking the names of the Walt House's heads.

Novem removed her hood, and made a praying gesture.

"Dear heads of history. Lyle-sama has grown into a human strong as you were. The Walt House is in good hands. This Novem shall certainly make him ruler of the continent. He shall rule, and reclaim a strong world for humans."

The words of her heart close to a vow, with her own desires mixed in. Did they reach the ancestors sleeping under the stone…

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Once LYLE had disappeared from that room of memories, Celes had stopped popping out.

It no longer showed anything to revive the ancestors' traumas, and when the door was opened, it instantly linked to the bedroom I had been imprisoned.

With the absence of that pervy brat who voiced his desire for me to line up the female camp and equip them with garters, it felt lonely.

The room felt a little wider.

I had entered my own room of memories on invite from Milleia-san, but I had never asked what we would be doing there.

"Milleia-san, what are we here for? And Lyle's phrasing implied the next time would be the last one."

Milleia-san looked over her room, and touched her fingertips to a

dusty heirloom. Tracing her finger across it, her finger turned white from the dust.

『Lyle.』

“Yes?”

My name called, I tried to approach, but I suddenly retreated back.

What Milleia-san had approached with and turned to me was a gun. It had a bayonet attacked, a single-shot pistol capable of close quarter combat.

“… How dangerous.”

When I said that, she tucked the gun into her sleeve, and smiled.

『Good reaction. If you’ve mastered your body to such a level, the possibility exists. I panicked when LYLE abandoned his duty, but if that’s how it is, we can move on.』

Saying that, Milleia-san swung her left hand to the side. The room’s insides were dyed gray, and the scenery changed.

Once its color had returned… it was a place I didn’t know, or a scene from my faded memory… an unknown view expanded around.

Milleia-san looked at me, and spoke.

『The third one would be me… Milleia, Lyle.』

She had called herself a guide, but it seems she was the final charge. Hearing that, I thought of her disappearing as well. But unlike the first Septem-san, she was a difficult foe like LYLE.

I thought she wouldn’t disappear so easily, yet some part of me felt relief at that fact.

『… Rather than that conflicted look on your face, I’d preferred it if you were obediently surprised. But my role is the same. There is a truth you have to learn no matter what.』

Trying to make it so she couldn't see through my thoughts, I asked.

"What is it?"

『Perhaps you already noticed, but the one who defeated Agrissa… the Septem of three hundred years ago wasn't anyone of the Bahnseim House.』

"… That is… I wonder."

How did the Bahnseim House defeat Agrissa? To add onto that, there was a surprising scarcity of records of the time. Before the Bahnseim Kingdom, there was the Sentrass Kingdom that dominated the continent.

One of the provincial nobles of Sentrass, the Bahnseim House, saved the continent from Agrissa's rule, and took a seat on the throne. After that, the other feudal lords went independent, and the continent was never unified as it was three hundred years ago.

『The important one wasn't the Bahnseim's. Well, granted they had a few wise rulers among them, they were generally ones to cause more problems around. Even for me, without thinking hard about it, I have nothing but detestable remembrance of them, so I don't really care.』

Absolutely no loyalty to royalty. Well, to feudal lords, anyone would want the authority of the crown, and any chivalrous devotion was second to second. You could also say they'd lower their heads to any authority that would recognize their rule as correct.

『Do you remember Tressy? At that time, the Divine Best whale… the white whale was there, right? Recall the words she spoke.』

Come to think of it, she did say something when we took Tressy down. And her atmosphere was one as if she knew of three hundred years passed.

"Something of a hero who bore my name… but I didn't hear the specifics."

On my words, Milleia-san smiled.

『… Lyle, to tell you the truth, there's something that came to mind when you said you'd get the continent in your hands. As I thought, I'd returned to the hands of my owner. Do you believe in fate, Lyle?』

I didn't know what she was talking about, so I tilted my head. She went on.

『For three hundred years… the throne lent to Bahnseim. Take it back. From the start that belonged to the Walt House. Preventing the mere mention of it, Bahnseim who stole the Walt House's achievements, the time has come for you to get it all back.』

I gulped in surprise, and sought confirmation from her.

"Um, you mean to say…"

『The Walt House… there was a young man, the heir to that name. He truly was a person, simply strong man. An age where if you couldn't use magic, there weren't any Magic Tools to use. Without even a gem in his hands, the hero who challenged Agrissa with nothing but a simple body-strengthening Skill.』

In the surrounding scene, a number of tents were prepared, and it looked as if war was to start.

In that place, a young man walked up with a loud voice.

『Yo, Novem, you doing fine? Properly eating and sleeping?』

Gahahaha, the youth raising a hearty laugh was tall, with a large sword draped over his back. it wasn't a lump of iron like the First used, a true two-handed longsword.

And the young man called Novem was a man of slender features? Appearance-wise, you could take him for female too.

『I can hear you, you don't have to be so loud Lyle.』

Lyle… now where have I heard that name before.

『Sorry about that. We're going to go on the offense. I'm so overflowing with energy, I can't help it.』

The rough young man drew his sword, and lightly swung it around. That Novem… watched over it. Breathing out a sigh, he looked a little happy.

Milleia spoke.

『… That person is of the Forxuz House. A clan with talent in Magic, is how it became. Imperial Nobles with Count standing at the time.』

Hearing the Forxuz House were Counts, I was surprised once more.

"Then what… no, I should hear this out first."

Milleia-san nodded, and the two young men continued their conversation.

『By the way, Lyle, you talked it out with Count Bahnseim, right? He's a guy I wouldn't really want on the front lines.』

My ancestors put away his sword, and shrugged his shoulders.

『He didn't want to hear it from a lowly knight house heir like me. Well, I'm just satisfied he's putting out soldiers.』

The man of the Forxuz House narrowed his eyes.

『They'll be a bad influence on the soldiers you gathered yourself. Put a stop to it. We decided we would fight alongside you, Lyle. That Bahnseim who watches on, and jumps in at the good point to take the achievements… I hate that man.』

『Don't be like that, Novem. We've assembled the troops and supplies. All that's left is to jump into the capital, and knock that Agrissa hag down a peg, right. I've decided I'll be the first one to pound a fist into her face, but I'll concede the second blow onwards.』

The youth of the Forxuz House gave a bitter smile.

『Well you're the same as ever. Even like that, Agrissa is well versed in martial arts and magic. She isn't an easy foe.』

There, my ancestor raised a smile like the First's, and declared.

『That doesn't matter. Get close and strike! That's all it takes. Once it's all over, let's get a drink. You've really stuck with me the longest.』

The Forxuz House man laughed a little sadly.

『… I feel sorry for your wife, so I'll refrain. She's got a child in her stomach, right?』

There, the scene turned gray.

Milleia-san turned to me, and spoke.

『Lyle, are you prepared to learn it all?』

The Legitimate Successor

What Milleia-san told me; the one who defeated Agrissa… the beautiful vixen… was of the Walt House.

But the important part was blurred in a sand storm, and I couldn't see it.

Unable to see what was going on around, and unable to understand what was going on, the scenes continued, and once everything was over the images grew vivid.

"I couldn't see the important part…"

『Quiet down! We're at the important part.』

Milleia-san extended her index finger to my lips to silence me. It's true it was an important scene.

Holding the same name as me, the Hero who fought and won against Agrissa was unsteady on his feet. Before the throne… the audience chamber, the ceiling was blown off, and the walls and pillars were in a terrible state.

Beneath the unreliable light of night, the man used his sword as a walking stick to stand to his feet.

There was no way for me to know how he defeated Agrissa.

Around, those beside the young man were collapsed.

『God dammit, that hag… my comrades…』

In that terrible state, the man unsteadily walked, searching out his surviving comrades. There, a group with lights in their hands began flowing into the room.

Knowing they were allies, the young man smiled, and waved his hands.

『Yo, well aren't you late to the party. Sorry, could you search out

the survivors? Standing's all I can…』

He seemed to know the other party. The conspicuous crest on his body, it was one I had a recollection of.

The crest of the Bahnseim monarchy.

But that man of the Bahnseim House he though an ally silently shot an arrow into the young man. Unable to avoid it, the man was pierced by arrows one after the next, and collapsed.

Approaching the youth who'd fallen face up, was the man who seemed to be the Bahnseim House's head.

『W-why…』

The Bahnseim Head answered his words.

『It's because a lowly knight like you butted in that it came to this. Fret not. The Bahnseim House shall rule this continent.』

That the gold armor looked in so bad taste must be because of the Bahnseim House Head's unsightly weight. His chubby fingers were crammed into a ring adorned with a large gemstone.

『Oy, do it.』

The vassals of the Bahnseim House stuck their spear into the youth's collapsed comrades around. Among them, those alive raised cries.

『S-sto…』

『Che, how tenacious. Kill him too.』

The youth stabbed through by a vassal's spear spit blood from his mouth. Once he stopped moving, the vassals returned from around.

『It's no good. We cannot identify Agrissa's body. Though it's certain she's been defeated…』

Once the Bahnseim Head received the report, he started into covering it up

『Tsk, when we'll need Agrissa's corpse hereon… very well! Dress it up. By the time we raced over, Agrissa had killed them all. The one who dealt the final blow was us.』

Saying that, the Bahnseim House head looked at the throne before his eyes. While the surroundings were in tatters, the throne alone remained firm.

Walking to avoid the rubble, he headed for the seat. But perhaps because it was because it was too dark to see, his feet tripped up on something, causing him to fall.

"… That's…"

Milleia-san informed me.

『Right. Everything had already begun.』

Tripping over a blue jewel, that jewel fell towards the young man. Splashing into his pool of blood, it let off a faint light.

『W-what!』

Having hit his nose, the Bahnseim head's nose was bleeding. As everyone raced over, one took the blue gem in hand.

『This… doesn't look like a gemstone. It's man-made.』

On the retainer's words, the head burst into rage.

『A mere marble dare trip me… toss it out!』

He said, but around, similar red, blue and yellow gems rolled around. Loads of them tumbled down, causing mass confusion.

『Please wait, we'll gather them up at once.』

The retainer tossed the Jewel aside, causing it to mix in with the many similar gems.

And once the image turned terribly unstable, a different scene was projected.

Going on in the plaza of Centralle as a parade. The parade of Bahnseim defeating Agrissa… and it meant the birth of a new monarchy.

The one directing a sharp glare at that parade was young man Novem. He was wearing a hood, and after entering a back alley, he slipped into a street, and headed for a certain house.

Seeing the place he reached, I found myself surprised.

It was the house the First was born. The Walt House's house, with some vestiges of the house the First had shown me.

As Novem stood before that imperial noble knight's house, from within, a single woman came out. A woman who gave off a simple feel. Her hair was tied behind, and she carefully held her large stomach.

『Hear me out, I'll get revenge for Lyle. The situation behind his death was plain off. There's no way Agrissa would use a spear. There's no doubt the wound was inflicted by the equipment of the Bahnseim House. The Feudal Lords doubting it will definitely never recognize the Bahnseim House's rule of the continent…』

Once he had said that much, the woman shook her head.

『Please, just go away. I've already married in here. If I have a son, they promised to make him the heir. The second son's already been married, so there's little more one could ask for. Don't get any more involved with us.』

Novem opened his eyes wide. As it wasn't a conversation for outside the house, he tried to step in, when the woman cried out.

『Go away!』

『… Why?』

Novem looked as if he couldn't believe it. But the woman shed tears as she glared at him.

『… Lyle is already dead. Just leave it that. And I shall live quietly

in this house. The people of the Walt House said it was because of me the House would survive as knights, so I should treasure it. Just go away already.』

The woman seemed to be my ancestor's wife. And not wanting any more strife, she turned her back to Novem, and entered the house.

Novem muttered.

『Lyle's child is necessary. Otherwise… the continent will never get together. Those Bahnseims don't have anywhere near the power to control the continent. Why can't they understand that.』

His expression was of despair.

And the Jewel began flowing the following events by in fragments.

The Bahnseim House tried to control the continent, but there was no way they had that sort of power from the start. Not recognizing the Bahnseim House's rise, the Provincial Nobles declared their independence one after the next. The Bahnseim House had become royalty, but they didn't have the hands to manage their expanded territory, and lacked the leisure to attack the lords who'd declared independence.

And as if to say goodbye to that House, young Novem threw away his status, and moved to the outskirts with a pioneering brigade. The Bahnseim House had tried to hold down such a talented magician, but Novem had turned all their offers down with a smile.

By the time the lords were exhausted further in independence and war, Novem was only looking on the scene from far off.

He started up a home in the frontier with a few acquaintances, took a husband, and had a child.

"… Wait, he was a woman?"

Having stopped her crossdressing, and returning to womanhood, Novem continued gazing at the continent's state from the sidelines. She had been of delicate features from the time she was male, but as a woman, she was even more beautiful.

『From long ago, the ones with a strong affinity for the Goddesses memories have been women. Can't imagine why.』

With much blood flowing, it took the passage of a few decades from then for the continent to calm down.

And once that was done with, the Bahnseim Kingdom that had remained sedentary began invading its neighbors. And by the time it had reached a considerable scale, Novem already had a grandchild.

Exhausted, the people whose blood would never cease to spill.

Eventually, some country's Labyrinth ran amuck, flooding the continent with monsters. That chaotic land wouldn't get together even with Agrissa's defeat, it was in a terrible state.

As an old woman, Novem's eyes looked somewhat spaced out. And as she muttered…

『So even if you prepare them a common foe, man still remains foolish…』

… Carrying on the goddess' memories, it looked as if her grasp on who she was, was becoming uncertain.

To that elder Novem, a great grandchild hurriedly returned.

Milleia-sam spoke.

『Even when her son had passed, Novem carried a goddess' memories, and a portion of her power. With such a strong force within, it seems she could live longer than those around. 』

Why was a scene like this left behind? As I thought that, the grandchild pulled a young man along, and seeing him, Novem was shocked.

Setting his unkempt brown hair with a hand, a large man entered the room.

『I've pioneered the land next door, I'm Basil Walt. Thought I'd

come to greet, for argument's sake… Ah, here's some meat. Got ale as well.』

The man that was her great grandchild shook his head.

『Basil, my great grandmother doesn't really eat…』

Novem raised her upper half off the bed, corrected her posture before the First, and sat.

『I guess I'll have some, it's been a while. And you called yourself Basil Walt? Could it be you were born in Centralle, and you hail from an imperial noble knight house?』

On Novem's words, the First… Basil smiled wide.

『Lady, you're the first to ever look at me, and guess I'm an imperial noble. That's right. Third son of the Walt House.』

At the chest of the First, who stuck in his thumb to point to himself, hung a blue gem wrapped and hung with a string. Novem looked at it, and made a bit of a serious expression, before smiling.

『Prepare a banquet. They're our important neighbors. Make it perfect.』

『G-great grandma?』

The great grandson was confused. Seeing Novem so delighted, he likely didn't have any idea what to say.

『Sorry for that. Or rather, it's my first time pioneering, and I have no idea what I'm supposed to do. Could I ask you a few things, lady?』

Novem smiled

『I don't see why not.』

Seeing the First's brazen attitude, she looked even happier.

『Really! Alright! Next time I'll bring over a bear or boar or

something bigger as a gift. Shucks, it really helps that our neighbors are good people. In Centralle, I heard we'd be at each other's throats a lot.』

Novem explained with a smile.

『Fights over water, and food supplies… it's quite often you'll fight with your neighbors. At times like that, are you the type to trick your surroundings, Basil-dono?』

Hearing that, the First crossed his arms, and thought. It wasn't suited for him. And after stopping his thoughts, he grinned.

『There's a forest nearby. A forest with plenty of monsters. I'm sure there's a Labyrinth in there. So I'm going to cut it open, and secure some land. There's sure to be some water somewhere. And that's problem solved. If it's a land no one owns, then doesn't it belong to whoever opens it up?』

Novem looked a little troubled.

『No, I was speaking hypothetically, and I wasn't asking about your present state. Good grief…』

As she said that, Novem looked happy. As if she was recalling her previous conversations with that young man.

『To hell with that. With so many monsters around, what's going to happen if we humans don't work together. Well, even like this, I've got some power. If a monster comes out, give me a holler. I'll send it flying.』

Seeing the First smile, Novem looked truly delighted.

And Milleia-san spoke.

『… Lyle, to Novem. No, to those that inherited Novem's memories, the Walt House is a meaningful House. Because they're the strong people Novem wished for. The form of the humans who wouldn't stop moving forward. To add onto that, they think to give the continent to its rightful successor. That is the truth of the Forxuz House who continued supporting up the Walts.』

Today, I learned the truth of the Forxuz House.

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… May had parted from Lyle's party to meet up with Novem's unit.

From the Margrave or Resno's land, Lyle's party headed towards Cartaffs.

Lyle was lying asleep, and he showed no signs of waking.

Aria called out to Monica, who was humming as she worked on winter clothing.

"Once we reach Cartaffs, we'll return to South Beim, right? Will we make it in time?"

To tease Lyle, Monica had been knitting some children's' clothing.

"We'll make it, so I think it will be fine. We've already put things in place, so all that's left is for Beim to do its best. Though it intrigues me the general governing that once-neighboring country was surprisingly competent. Oh, it's perfect if I do say so myself."

Finishing up the baby's clothing, Monica looked satisfied, Carefully storing them away, she started into her next project.

Aria let out a sigh.

"Stop it with the baby jokes. There are plenty of people around Lyle who lack a sense of humor. Like that Tres House's Fidel-san, it seems he really tried to assemble some baby goods."

Monica to Aria.

"You're mistaking something. I'm making them for real. I'll help out, and I'll be perfectly prepared whenever that chicken's dear chicks poke their heads out. Good grief, it really will get busy."

Saying it would be busy, Monica looked delightful.

Shannon was desperately studying how to read. In Porter's loading tray, she looked at the paper Clara had prepared, and was copying down its contents.

"So you spell it like… why do those letters look so similar! That's downright hard to understand!"

"Hah, just make a guess from the words that precede it. That's still been written quite neatly, let me tell you."

The one looking over Shannon was, surprisingly enough, Lianne. Having changed from a dress to something easier to move around in, she was assisting in Shannon's education.

Aria couldn't see the princess who leapt at Lyle in insanity a few days ago and the current Lianne as the same person.

"Um, it may be wrong for me to ask something like this, but Lianne-sama, do you…"

"Just Lianne is fine, Aria-san. I've got to be respectful of my seniors in the business."

Aria hesitated as she asked Lianne.

"You were taken out of Faunbeux, but do you really plan to, you know with Lyle…"

Do you really plan on marrying him? As she posed that question, Lianne scoffed.

"I heard you were formerly the daughter of a baron, so can't you understand? To be blunt, I don't have the freedom to choose my partner. And this isn't so bad a deal. I'm amazed by all the preparations your party has put in. It truly is astounding."

Lianne turned to Aria as she spoke.

"It really looks like you'll be able to rule the continent. But… it's still too soft. There are plenty of gaps to take advantage of. I'm

marrying in. It would be troublesome if something like failure were to come, so I won't be sparing in my assistance."

Aria hesitated some more at Lianne's smile. She knew her opponent didn't have any considerable power, but her instincts were screaming not to make an enemy of her.

"Well, love and all that shit can come later, so for now let's work towards victory. If we don't win, nothing will come of it, and if I don't cooperate, I'll never be able to overtake my seniors."

Ignoring Lianne's words, Aria spoke.

"More importantly, have you given up on revenge? Lyle has no intent for revenge against Celes."

Hearing that, Lianne looked down a bit.

"… Humans don't change so easily. It's regretful and detestable… but it's even more regretful not to move forward. And I'd hate not doing what I can even more."

Having taken Parselena's words, it seems Lianne had chosen to move forward.

Epilogue

Following the subjugation of Agrissa, the founding of the Bahnseim Kingdom, and the division of the continent…

Having heard that flow, and heard of the Walt House's relation to the Forxuz House, the Third's voice quietly reverberated through the Jewel.

『Hah, why is it the most important part is always left out? We have to know just how Agrissa was defeated… no one here really cares about the Bahnseims, right?』

His discouraged expression was a surprise for both me and Milleia-san. No, to that man, perhaps that was the correct way.

The Fifth seated himself on the table, and looked up at the ceiling as he folded his arms.

『Get close and strike, huh? Meaning the ancestor of the Walt House managed to pull that off. If the Forxuz ancestor who specialized in magic was operating separately, perhaps that witch was specialized against magic. Is that why she was recorded on a Yellow Jewel specialized to Rearguard?』

But the Seventh touched his chin, speaking with a serious expression.

『If that's how it is, I must remark that Celes in a monster in close quarters as well. I can't say for sure this makes for good reference. But I really could care less, or should I say, it's a dubious tale.』

All three of them showed some doubt at the tale of the Walt House's predecessor. When I was so mindful of the Forxuz House's side of it, none of them seemed to pay it any mind.

"Um, about the Forxuz House…"

The Third smiled.

『Hmm? Isn't that fine? It's a bit of a heavy reason, but we've

identified why they've served the Walt House all these years. Well, Novem-chan is a memory holder, and her sentiment towards the Walt House is so strong I don't know if she's actually looking at you, Lyle, but that's something you're going to have to resolve yourself. Rather, our ancestor really was too naïve.』

The Seventh agreed with him.

『Even if we spread that the Walt house defeated Agrissa at this point in time, if we can't prove its truth, it will just be a lie. Even if you prove it, 'and so?' is the reaction you should expect.』

The Fifth made a conflicted expression as he looked at me and Milleia-san.

『I'm sure our ancestor had his regrets, and I do want to do something for him, but… if Lyle conquers the continent, and makes it so Bahnseim was the bad guy to recover his honor, that's the best we can do. But if we do something like that, you know…』

The three looked at one another, and nodded. As a representative, the Third opened his mouth.

『To be frank, it will be thought of as propaganda to make you look important. Well, all rulers, to a greater or lesser extent, do it to put on airs, and I'll admit it's important. But why so late? Is the feeling it gives. In truth, even if we bring ruin to Bahnseim, it's not like it won't weigh on our conscience. I mean look, that was three hundred years ago.』

Once upon a time, it would have been able to take it back and restore our ancestor's honor. We could've worked towards it. But at this point Bahnseim was too terrible to advocate for. And the Walt House was also terrible. Even if we could call it the Walt House's just cause, Celes' actions had ruined it.

The Seventh let out a sigh.

『At the end of the end, if you ask whether it'll be any use, that dubious conclusion is…』

The three of them were disappointed, and seeing them like that,

Milleia-san was shaking.

『What's with you all! You got to learn of the Walt house's legitimate claim, and of the Forxuz House! Just think about it a bit. The Bahnseim House stole your ancestor's achievements, causing the continent to split and lead to where we are now!』

The Third's opinion was cool-headed.

『No, it's not like Bahnseim's the only reason it split. I'm sure they wanted to go independent to begin with, and they should've had their dissatisfactions. And just because they were unified, that doesn't guarantee they would be happy.』

The Fifth looked at me.

『Hey, it's that. Lyle… to clear our ancestor's lingering regret, there's no helping it but to destroy the Bahnseim house. Think of it like that, and it'll be a load off your mind. And isn't that fine for now? Rather, could it be the name Lyle is…』

The Seventh hit his hands together as if remembering something.

『When my son and his wife were troubled over thinking up a name, they went to consult with the Forxuz House! Well, isn't that fine. In such a long history, there are sure to be some name overlaps somewhere.』

The Third smile.

『That's right, but… heavy. You're heavy, Forxuz House! But you did look after us, so we should at least overlook that much. Lyle, that's how it is, so look after Novem-chan, won't you?』

What is this, I don't even. Not just in a lifetime, their treatment of a clan that spent every generation serving the Walt Hosue was way too light.

"Um, just what should I say next I see Novem?"

The Fifth to me.

『Think over it yourself. Rather, if you love her, accept her. Though if she's looking at you, or through you to the Walt House, and that hero of the past, who can say.』

When you put it like that, it's true Novem permitted a harem, and some parts of her sense of values were different. No, if she was truly looked at me as a royal line… then I'm curious to how she sees me as an individual.

The Third sighed.

『Ah～ I really thought we'd learn Agrissa's weakness from that you know. Just the right moment for it to avoid the question. What's this, when I had my expectations up.』

Shaking in rage, Milleia-san moved, instantly drew a gun, and discharged it. The bullet hit the Third head on… or not. The bullet embedded into the chair he had been sitting in, and disappeared.

Within the Jewel. In the round table room, only his voice was audible.

『Hey, don't be so angry. It's not like we're saying Milleia-'chan' is useless or anything like that. Just looking at the result, you weren't any use, but you're cute, so I'll forgive it. C'mon, my dear granddaughter.』

As he riled, Milleia-san directed a vexed expression around.

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… The Randbergh House.

A lineage that had become a knight House during the Walt Third Generation Head's time.

They had served as vassal knights to the Walts generation after generation, and had even gotten a daughter of it married in. A firm

house, even in the Walt's territory, enough that once the Walt House had moved its manor to manage its expanded territory, they were left to look after what was left.

A knight Lyle admired, 【Vail Randbergh】 was the second son of the present head of the House. Right now, he was serving at the Walt House Manor, under Celes' influence.

To the current head, Novem spoke.

This was a vital land to the Forxuz House, one that even Celes was too wary to lay hand upon.

The head wasn't under her influence.

"… That is the present situation, Randbergh-sama."

The man passed his fifties had conspicuous wounds over his body. Many from war, and perhaps his body would no longer moved as he willed it, as he carried a staff.

"They wouldn't keep me company when I came by the mansion, but I never thought it would have gone so bad."

Covering his face with both hands, the Randbergh House head looked dispirited.

"It's true the state of the mansion was strange. I've confirmed it as well. But with my younger brother by their side, I never thought it would…"

To Novem, the Randbergh House was a trustworthy one with high loyalty. Worthy of sheltering Lyle, and managing the land once raised by the First.

That's why Novem had dropped by this land. To confirm Celes had done as promised, and not lain a hand on it.

Novem lowered her head towards the head.

"Radbergh-sama, could you lend some soldiers for Lyle-sama's sake? At present, the force he can move himself is much too small."

The Randbergh House head nodded. But at the same time, he called a youth to the room.

“Understood. We Randberghs have a debt to the Walt House. If it will help Lyle-sama stand, I will send troops. But my body no longer listens to me. Baldoir, come in.”

A youth called Baldoir entered the room. He was tall in stature, his tidy brown hair silkily extending to his back.

His emerald eyes were sharp, while his body was trained.

“Baldoir, you heard our conversation, right? Go serve under Lyle-sama. I’ll send people from the territory. Take at least three hundred with you.”

On the Randbergh House head’s words, the man called Baldoir looked a little surprised.

“Three hundred? Father, at present, even two hundred and the territory’s management will be…”

His father raised his staff a little, before hitting it into the floor. There, Baldoir closed his mouth.

To Novem.

“My apologies. It seems he doesn’t understand the severity of the matter. But Baldoir has gone through his first campaign, and from the eyes of a parent, he’s a skilled one. He’s a little inexperienced, but I’m sure he’ll be useful. It’s just, for us, three hundred is the limit. We’ll do our best to prepare some youths with power, but with me alone, I can’t send out any more troops.”

From Novem’s point of view, she was counting on around two hundred. Even that was more than a tenth of the military force of the territory. With three hundred, it was a number that would bring problems to the rule.

But now, she wanted as many troops as possible.

“My deepest gratitude. Then we will be heading south. There, we’ll

enter Djanpear, and take a ship to South Beim."

Baldoir was a little surprised.

"From Djanpear to Beim? The eastern front has grown flurried, and a war is starting there, correct? Understood. I shall prepare at once."

With brisk movements, he left the room.

Novem watched off his back, and recalled the Fifth's daughter once sent to this house as a bride.

(… All is for Lyle-sama's sake.)

But no one could tell which Lyle she spoke of…

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… Adele heard the report from the Valkyries she's brought alone, and held her head.

Lyle's party had gotten cooperation from Faunbeux, and had even taken in the Margrave of Resno managing the border.

Novem's unit had attained Djanpear's cooperation, and the surrounding countries were currently negotiationg with Jules.

And yet, Adele side was small, one that could crumble at any moment. She hadn't gotten any significant results.

"… I should have attempted larger houses."

The one comforting a depressed Adele was Maksim.

"Milady, it isn't all bad things. Looking to results, we have gotten several thousand troops on our side."

Those several thousand, to be precise, fell short of five thousand. If

things went poorly, there was a fear it would drop below three thousand.

Adele didn't know just how much assistance the feudal lords would offer. Perhaps there were some thinking to betray as well.

When she reported as such to Lyle, the Valkyries expressionless relayed his response.

"Isn't that fine? You've handed the item in question to the trustworthy lord. Even if a traitor comes out, there isn't a problem. Lyle-sama is delighted the preparations are getting together. Hah, why wasn't I stationed closer to Lyle-sama."

Thinking that last bit was unnecessary, Adele prepared to return to South Beim. These days, she had it rough consulting on the worries and complaints of small-time feudal lords.

Understanding the reason Lyle had got his hands on such a large-time lord, Adele discussed with Maksim on what was to come.

"Maksim, seeing the rise in the cost of living, and the gathering of troops in the east, what do you think? By the time they flow into Beim…"

"… The harvest will be over, and it will be winter. A little longer, they'll be ready to make their march on Beim. I'm sure it won't even be two months before they arrive at Fortress Redant."

As Maksim said it with confidence, Adele nodded in relief. With that much time, she could move to Djanpear, take a ship from there, and return to South Beim.

"So how long will the fortress hold? From my point of view, I'm sure Beim has reinforced it, and their military force has increased, so over two months is…"

After she'd said that much, Maksim spoke to her with a serious face.

"… Milady, Fortress Redant will only hold a few weeks. At soonest, it will be breached within a week."

She couldn't believe those words.

But Maksim had much experience in war, and he was a man proficient as a knight. On these sorts of fields, she trusted his words. And she trusted the man as well.

"I'm sure they've reinforced, and the troops stationed will be much greater than when we were there. Even so, a few weeks?"

"Yes, that's right. If it were Lyle-dono, perhaps he'd be able to turn them back, but the possibility the pain would be split both ways would be high."

Adele wanted to know the reason. Simply because Beim had strong adventurers. If those adventurers were stationed, they should be able to fight to a certain extent. Adele had watched Lyle, so she thought as such.

"I've heard they've plenty of skilled adventurers to spare, though?"

"That's the hard part. Skilled in that sense means skilled in small platoons, and not skilled under the banner of a large legion. And it's hard to say they could establish uniformity. Even if a low-level general of Bahnseim led the army, I think they'll be able to breach in a few weeks."

Adele tilted her head.

"With Lyle-san's time, a pain as it was, they annihilated a legion of monsters."

Maksim looked troubled, as he scratched his head.

"And that's the problem. It's true a monster army is a threat, and they have simple strength in numbers, but… well, it just goes to show humans are more troublesome. And you seem to be mistaken, so let me offer a revision. When Lyle-dono is leading an army, it becomes frightfully strong."

Adele nodded.

"It's his Skills. The Walt House's head have left such Skills in that

blue gem of his, so…”

Maksim smiled. And he shook his head at her.

“It’s his talent to pull them off that’s a threat. And he’s unthinkably calm for his age, disinterestedly moving to solidify his surroundings. At times holding sentiment, at times cruel and cold… I don’t know another teen who’d move to that level to accomplish his goal. He holds the air of an old general, and he’s a foe I’d rather not fight.”

The Lyle Maksim evaluated. But if you said that to the man in question, he’d surely make a dubious expression. And the ancestors in the Jewel would definitely rain praise on Maksim. Because it would be as if he were evaluating them.

Adele could only take in the words of Maksim’s explanation. But it seems she couldn’t understand the deeper essence.

However, if that’s what Maksim said, that’s how it was, she agreed, and stood.

“Now then, in that case, we must hurry and prepare. It shall become busy. Maksim. I’m counting on you.”

Hearing that from Adele, Maksim’s face turned red, as he lightly rubbed beneath his nose with a fingertip.

“L-leave it to me, milady.”

Around, the Valkyries looked at him.

“It’s a waste. That serious air of his.”
“Wouldn’t there be a problem with their age gap?”
“But he’s a damn chicken that neither exceeds nor falls short of our master. We’ve left the two of them alone so many times, yet let alone laid a hand on her, he hasn’t even confessed.”
“… Though if he did, at this point, it would feel like a death flag.”

Adele and Maksim, not listening to the surrounding voices, smiled as they discussed their future plans…